



# **AFS Germany Safety-Tips**

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## Introduction

You may think that a booklet giving some advises about your safety is not a very pleasant way to welcome people. Our purpose is certainly not to scare or alarm you. By giving you the following tips, we just want you to avoid any trouble or incident during your stay in Germany and allow you to make the most of it.

In your country and in your cultural surroundings you have learned to avoid dangerous situations by instinctively following the rules you have been taught. These rules, which are often anchored in your subconscious, keep you safe. You know the places you better not go to, you notice as soon as someone makes a threatening impression (through their exterior, their behavior or the way they speak). These acquired instincts, which help to avoid danger, don't work for every country.

**Germany is generally a very safe country.** It can happen, however, that you get into an unpleasant or even dangerous situation and you may not know how to react according to our patterns of behavior.

That is why we advise you to read these tips carefully and talk about the subjects with your host family, your contact person or the AFS office.

## In and Around your Home

### *Within your Host Family*

Although there are security instructions which are valid throughout Germany, there may be regional differences. Therefore we recommend that you talk about the following questions with your host family:

- What should I do in case of an emergency? Whom should I call?
- Where do you keep the emergency phone numbers (family, doctors, relatives,...)?
- Do you have a first aid equipment? Where is it?
- Do you have a smoke detector and a fire extinguisher? Where is it?
- Do you always lock your windows and doors?
- Am I going to have a house key? What if I forgot it?
- How should I react if I am at home by myself and someone rings at the door?
- Do I answer the phone when I am on my own? Which information may I pass on to unknown persons when answering?
- Are there any dangerous household appliances (e.g. gas stove,...)?

### *Outside*

During the day it is usually safe to go out by yourself. At night you should be more careful. In both cases we strongly advise you to follow your host family's instructions. Always let your host family know where you are going, with whom and when they should expect you back. Always leave a telephone number where you can be reached.

Talk about the following with your host family:

- Is it safe to walk around the neighborhood by night?
- Which areas in my host community are not safe for me – at night/at daytime?
- How can I feel safe when alone, especially at night?
- What should I do if I get lost or separated from my friends?
- Is it safe to use public transport (bus, underground, train) at all times?
- What if an emergency occurs outside?

**Ask you host family about any situation in which you feel uncertain or frightened!**

## Protection of minor laws

If you want to go out with friends, please be aware of the protection of minors laws:

- If you go to the movies, pay attention to the age limit. Films might be restricted to audience over 16 or 18 years of age.
- Without a person who has parental responsibility, **adolescents under 16 are not allowed to:**
  - enter a pub or disco
  - drink beer, wine and other alcohol in public or buy it in shops
  - attend gambling halls
- Without a person who has parental responsibility, **adolescents from 16 – 18 are not allowed to:**
  - stay longer than 12 pm in a restaurant, pub or disco
  - drink alcoholic beverages (incl. mixed drinks) other than beer or wine in public
- Smoking under the age of 18 is prohibited!

**All drugs** (also light drugs such as marijuana, ecstasy-tablets) **are illegal in Germany. Stay away from them!!!** If you get involved with any kind of drugs your stay in Germany will be terminated immediately by AFS.

## AFS Germany Rules

In addition to these laws AFS Germany sets the following **rules**:

- Obeying family rules
- Regular school attendance
- Following the law
- No driving of motor-driven vehicles
- No pregnancy
- Obeying traveling rules

Breaking of any of these rules will lead to termination of your stay in Germany!

## Fare dodging

If you use public transportation, be sure to have a valid ticket. If you are owner of a monthly ticket check for which kind of transportation it may be used. The tickets for bus, tram, underground or S-Bahn generally have to be bought before starting the trip. They can be purchased either at the station, at the instructor, or at a ticket machine inside the vehicle. If you are unsure, ask someone.

Don't use public transportation without a valid ticket. If you get caught, you not only have to pay a service fee (40-60 EURO), but also a complaint may be filed.

## Music download

It is illegal in Germany, as in any other country, to offer or download copyrighted music or video files. German authorities prosecute violations, even in minor cases. Severe fines will be charged.

## Uncomfortable Social Situations – “Time to say no”

### *Physical Issues*

Especially during your first weeks in Germany you might be unsure how to consider other persons behavior. A “brother kiss” for example is very normal in certain countries; it might not be in yours. In general in Germany the form of reception and interaction depends a lot on the relation you have with that person. Relations are depending mostly on “knowing a person well” and not so much on the status that the person has compared to you. If you are in doubt, discuss this openly with your AFS counsellor, your host family, other AFS-volunteers or staff members.

Be aware that sexuality may be shown very open in public in Germany. E.g. Companies use erotic pictures to advertise their products. You will not only see them in magazines, but also displayed along the streets.

It is also quite common among young people to talk about sexuality. That does not mean that you are expected to join that conversation or even talk about your own experience. It is your right to refuse an answer, and no one will force you to.

Overall, you should not compromise your own personal values and beliefs regarding sexual behavior. **If you feel** you have been exposed to sexual harassment speak about it to your host family, AFS contact person or your regional AFS-Office. You may also contact [timetosayno@afs.org](mailto:timetosayno@afs.org) for advice. You will also receive more information about this issue at your first camp in Germany.

## ***Peer pressure and Alcohol***

If you go out with friends, especially if visiting bars or clubs, it may be common among your friends to consume alcohol. You will be probably offered some drinks as well. Be sure not to feel pressured to do anything you don't want to. You always have the right to decline the offer, and this will be fully accepted.

It is accepted in Germany though to consume alcohol within the legal limits as written above. Be aware that German students might be used better to Alcohol than you are. If you choose to drink a beer or so, be careful with what you do. Especially don't go swimming after consuming alcohol! You might drown.

## **Diseases and Dangerous Animals**

Germany is one of the safest countries as for diseases and dangerous animals.

But even if sexual diseases such as HIV are proportionally rare in Germany, you should follow the well known rules of behaviour. If you are uncertain, ask a person you trust in.

In **certain areas** of Germany there is the risk of Lyme disease and FSME. Ask your host parents about this. Both diseases are transmitted by ticks – a tiny animal (as small as a pin) which lives in forests and meadows. In case you find something sitting on your skin that won't blow away, ask your host parents for advice. If the surrounding area of skin turns red days later or you get fever, you need to see the doctor.

## **Cycling, Bathing, Risky Sports**

Risky sports (e.g. climbing) are not permitted within the AFS program. You need a sports waiver signed by your natural parents for these activities.

If you ride a bike, ask you host parents about dangerous crossings and the traffic rules for cyclists. Attention, we have right hand traffic in Germany! Do not ride in the dark without lights. Lock your bike to prevent theft.

Do not go swimming if you do not feel safe – even if others want you to join them. Be careful when bathing in the open sea (your host parents or natives will inform you about the dangers of the tide). If swimming in lakes, do not jump in even if you think it is deep enough.

## **General Safety Considerations**

There are pickpockets, be most aware when shopping in crowds. Even at school, thefts are possible, so take care of your money and personal belongings. **Always** lock your bicycle.

Also always carry an id-card with you (it doesn't necessarily have to be your passport) as you might be asked to show your identification.

Natural disasters are very rare in Germany. Occasionally floods occur along the main rivers, especially during spring time. Those floods usually don't come unexpected and therefore won't set you into a dangerous situation. You will be instructed how to behave well in advance by your host family or local authorities. Some regions (particularly along the Rhine river) are also experiencing minor earthquakes from time to time. These earthquakes are usually small so that you may not even notice them.

## Emergency Phone Numbers

- General Emergency numbers (free call, no pre-code):

<b>Police:</b>	<b>110</b>
<b>Fire:</b>	<b>112</b>
<b>Ambulance:</b>	<b>19222 or 112</b>

- AFS office:

During office hours (app. 10am to 4pm)

- AFS Regional Office Hamburg 040 – 399 222 - 0

After office hours

- AFS emergency mobile: 0162 – 10 51 881

## Conclusions

- 1. Get to know the host culture well. Keep talking and discussing with your host family, peers, local AFS volunteers.**
- 2. Take concerns expressed by your host family or school seriously. Follow their advice.**
- 3. Do not ignore your own “instinct” in any given situation!**

**Besides your host family AFS provides you with local volunteers that are always happy to help you. Make sure you get to know your local AFS contact person. Take down her/his phone number and do not hesitate to call in case of any questions or concerns.**