

# AFS ICELAND STUDENT HANDBOOK

Uppáhalds orðið mitt er

HÉRNA.....

PLEASE BRING THIS WITH YOU TO ICELAND  
THIS MATERIAL WILL BE USED ON YOUR ARRIVAL ORIENTATION

## VELKOMIN TIL ÍSLANDS!

AFS Iceland, staff and volunteers are looking forward to meeting you in August. We send you this booklet to welcome you among us and to prepare you for your experience in Iceland. We hope you will find the booklet useful, bring it with you and continue to refer to it throughout your stay in Iceland.

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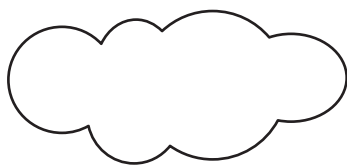
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### WELCOME TO ICELAND

When you arrive at the airport in Keflavik, the staff or volunteers of AFS Iceland will meet you. Please make sure your „AFS -Label“ is clearly visible on your luggage, so we can find you quickly. From the airport, we will drive you to the arrival camp where you will get some rest after your trip and get to meet the other exchange students and volunteers of AFS Iceland. At the arrival camp, you will also get some orientation that will prepare you for your year in Iceland. Probably you have already started preparing yourself in your home country by gathering information about Iceland. In this booklet, we will try to add to your knowledge of Iceland and its culture, introduce AFS Iceland to you and help you to get ready for leaving.



## 1. ICELAND AND ITS CULTURE

Iceland is the second-largest island in Europe, with a population of only 330.000. Even though the total area of the country is 103,000 km<sup>2</sup> (39,756 square miles) 62% of the population lives in Reykjavík, the capital of Iceland, and its surroundings.

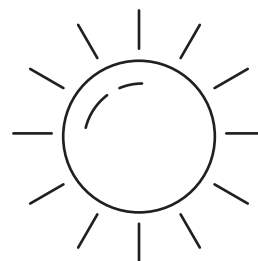
We have been living in our country for more than 1100 years. Our culture is Nordic but with Celtic and Northern European influences. Icelandic or „íslenska” as we call it, is an ancient Norwegian language and the same language our ancestors spoke when they came to Iceland. We have carefully preserved most of the old structure of the language. Therefore, by understanding our modern language you can understand what was written on calf skins early in the 12th century and onwards. The sagas, poetry and history which were written then are among our national treasures.

If you have already learned another language you will not find it too difficult to learn Icelandic, as it requires the same technique that is needed to learn any other language. Icelandic has its difficulties and it has some remarkably easy parts.

One of the greatest difficulties about learning Icelandic is the belief of Icelanders themselves, that Icelandic is a very difficult language to learn. Don't believe these people for one minute.

The second difficulty is the willingness of Icelanders to speak foreign languages, especially English. Be aware of that.

The sooner you learn Icelandic the sooner you will have Icelandic friends.



### 1.1 RELIGION

In the year 2000 Icelandic Christianity celebrated its 1000th anniversary. In 1550 we converted from Roman Catholicism to Lutheranism and today our State Church is Evangelic Lutheran. There is also a Roman Catholic church and various smaller religious groups active in Reykjavík and bigger towns. Most Icelanders seldom go to church, except at Christmas, Easter or on special occasions such as christenings, weddings and confirmations.

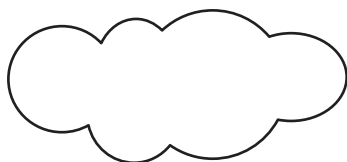
### 1.2 GOVERNMENT

Our political system has been democratic since 1944. Before that we were subjects to Danish and Norwegian kings for seven centuries. Independence was not totally new to us as we had enjoyed it in the first two and a half centuries of settlement.

Our political system is based on the Althing which is composed of 63 members chosen by the nation every four years. The President of Iceland is elected by a direct ballot and now Guðni Th. Jóhannesson is our President. The Presidency is regarded as a symbol of national unity and the President is not involved in party politics or directly involved in day-to-day political affairs.

### 1.3 CLIMATE

Icelandic climate has great variability and often the weather changes quite suddenly. It is much milder than might be expected considering the northerly location of Iceland. The average annual temperature for Reykjavík is 5°C (41°F) but the north is a bit cooler, especially in winter. The wettest regions are in the south and southeast. Coastal areas in Iceland tend to be windy, gales are common, especially in winter, but thunderstorms are extremely rare. Fogs are rather uncommon. The Northern Lights (Aurora Borealis) can often be seen, especially in autumn and early winter.



## 2. ICELANDIC CUSTOMS

### 2.1 THE NAME SYSTEM

The Icelandic name-system is probably not like the one you are used to, as most of us do not have the same family name as surnames. Instead we identify our family relations by calling ourselves daughter (dóttir) or son (son) of our fathers, most common, and in some cases son or daughter of our mothers first name. For example, Jón Pétursson' daughter will have the last name „Jónsdóttir“ that is the daughter of Jón. Women do not change their names when they get married. Look out for this in your family papers.

### 2.2 SMOKING

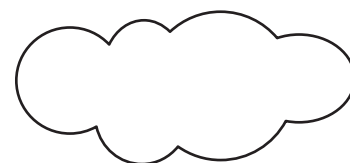
The law forbids smoking in public areas (such as buses and public buildings), cafés and restaurants. Smoking is not allowed in most Icelandic homes. AFS Iceland does not accept smokers as it is almost impossible to find families who are willing to host smokers. Participants who start smoking after arrival are breaking the AFS rules.

### 2.3 PETS

Some Icelandic families have pet(s), usually a cat or a dog and it is considered a member of the family.

### 2.4 DIET

Icelandic diet is mainly based on fish and meat. Fruits and vegetables used to be very expensive but that has changed. However they are not common purchases in every family. Therefore, AFS has not been able to accept vegetarians to Iceland. Changing your dietary habits to vegetarian after arrival is not acceptable during your participation.



### 2.5 MANNERS

People from different cultures have different opinions about what is considered good manners. You may find that you sometimes offend people when you think you are showing good manners. Icelanders have a habit of sniffing when they have a cold instead of blowing their noses all the time. This is often considered strange by our foreign exchange students. The best way to deal with any misunderstanding, or anything else that bothers you is to talk to your family about it. Most host families are more than willing to listen, explain and help. Here are some tips to help you start:

- ♥ We always thank people for the meal they serve by saying „takk fyrir mig“ and we always say good-bye „bless“ when we leave.
- ♥ We always say good night „góða nótt“ when we go to sleep and we normally say „góðan dag“ when we first meet in the mornings and when we meet people during the day.
- ♥ When we meet people in the evening we say „gott kvöld“. It's considered a bit formal to use „góðan dag“ and „gott kvöld“ especially among young people. They more often use „hæ“ and „halló“.
- ♥ We sometimes shake hands, especially the older ones, but only close friends and relatives kiss each other.
- ♥ We do not use formal titles, and we do not call anyone by their last name. You can address everyone directly without any formalities.
- ♥ We always take our shoes off when we enter a home.



### 3. YOUR ICELANDIC FAMILY

Your AFS family can be of many different kinds. With young or old parents, young children, teenagers or no children. In most families both parents work outside the home.

Housework is shared by the whole family and you must take part in it if you want to be a member of the family. Icelandic youth are taught to be self-sufficient and they are expected to clean their bedroom, change the linen, vacuum-clean or wash the floors, do the laundry, prepare meals and clean the kitchen after general use.

Even though many Icelandic families don't like to set specific rules there are some that generally apply in most Icelandic homes. For example, the following rules:

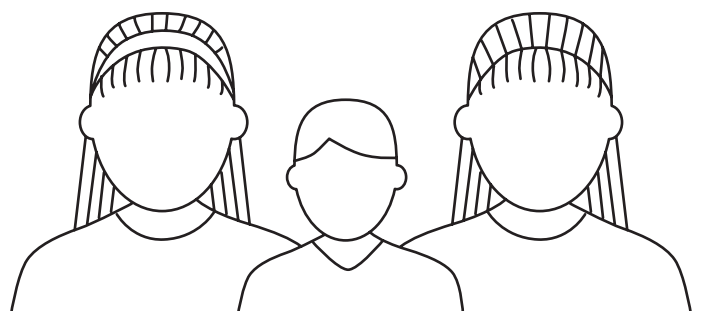
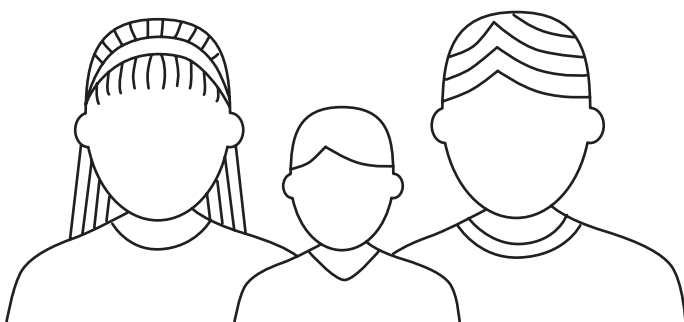
Children and teenagers usually ask for permission when using the phone or the internet. This is especially so if they make calls to other countries. It is very expensive to use the phone in Iceland and therefore you should discuss this matter with your family. Also keep in mind that downloading from the internet is expensive in Iceland. Downloading in Iceland is different from other countries. For example, as soon as you log on to your account on Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram or any other app on your computer, tablet or mobile you may be downloading. As soon as you open a website with another ending than .is you are downloading. All visits to foreign websites, including the one in our home country is downloading. All downloading should be paid for and it is expensive. Please don't watch movies or videos online unless discussing with your host family before.

Remember!

To discuss rules regarding the use of phone, computer and internet with your family

It is important for you to adapt to your new country not to spend time staying in your country through the internet. You will have difficulties in adapting if you are always online with friends and family in your home country and you will lose your opportunity to get to know Icelandic people and its culture. We don't want you to isolate yourself on the computer.

Show initiative, take the first step and discuss House Rules with your family.



When visiting other homes with or without your host family you should ask for permission for almost everything you do. For example, for having something to drink or eat, use the WC, log on to the computer or making a phone call. You are also not expected to look into the things of the hosts or enter their private areas such as bedrooms unless invited.

Curfews are set in many Icelandic homes but they differ from family to family. No matter what the curfews are like in your Icelandic home you should always inform your parents of where you're going and when you're coming home.

It is often very difficult for the exchange student if he or she does not know what is expected and what is not expected of him or her. Soon after your arrival you should sit down with your family and discuss house rules (regarding the phone, TV, internet, how much time you can spend on your computer, when to go to bed etc.), curfew and other matters. AFS has recommended that such rules are put forward by the host families. Don't hesitate to take the first step yourself because sometimes the families don't want to tell you what to do in the first days of your stay with them.

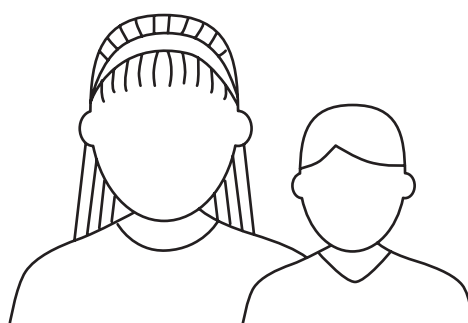
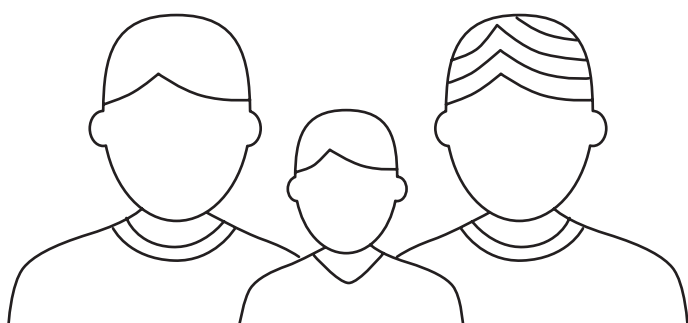
It is up to you and the family what you call your new parents. You best discuss it with your family but we recommend you to call them „mamma“ (mum) and „pabbi „ (dad).

In the first few weeks after your arrival both you and your host parents may feel nervous and slightly confused. You need to be very positive, patient and smile a lot.

You may have to ask millions of questions and to use your self-discipline to mingle with new people even though you would rather just stay in your room.

Our AFS program is a school program. Therefore school is an important part of your stay in Iceland. Many schools in Iceland have been hosting foreign students for years now. Exchange students in Iceland are, like all other students, expected to show real effort, both in their studies and in attendance at school.

- AFS programmes are school programmes.
- You must attend school classes all the time.
- You must show effort in your studies.



## 4. THE SCHOOL SYSTEM

The Icelandic school system has three main stages:

1. Grunnskóli. The compulsory level for 6-16 years old.
2. Framhaldsskóli. The continuing level, which is normally four years (students up to 20 years old). There are three main types of the Icelandic framhaldsskóli:
  - Menntaskóli, traditional class based school. Main function is to prepare students for University.
  - Fjölbautaskóli, comprehensive secondary school. Multiple choice schools with many purposes one of them being to prepare students for Universities. Students can also obtain various diplomas that will qualify them for different professions.
  - Iðnskóli, vocational school. The students seek training in specific fields of occupations like electricians, hairdressers etc.
3. Háskóli. The university, normally 3-4 years for the first degree, sometimes longer.

Most Icelandic teenagers continue their education after they have finished grunnskóli. Our exchange students attend framhaldsskóli or the last year of grunnskóli.

Other facts about Icelandic schools:

Schools in Iceland begin at the end of August or in early September. Exams are generally given in December and May. The school year ends after the exams in late May. Christmas holiday is 2-3 weeks long in Icelandic schools and Easter holiday is about a week long.

The relationship between students and teachers is normally relaxed and you will not find many authoritarian teachers. Teachers don't normally find it necessary to keep a tight eye on students. As you are expected to be self-motivated and independent, teachers and school don't regard themselves as your second parent but regards the school as your work place.





You don't get schoolbooks at school. AFS Iceland will provide you with text books from either its library or will refund book purchases which staff or local chapters have given permission for. All books paid for by AFS should be returned at the end of each semester.

Icelanders may seem a bit shy at first when you meet them. What you must remember as an exchange student is that you should not wait for the people to come to you. You are the one who must approach the people and that can be hard work sometimes. Exchange students need to be rather outgoing and use all opportunities to participate in the rich social life of Icelandic schools. The sooner you learn Icelandic, the sooner you will have Icelandic friends. The students' community has developed all sorts of traditions, competitions between the schools, and extra-curricular activities. Feel free to participate.

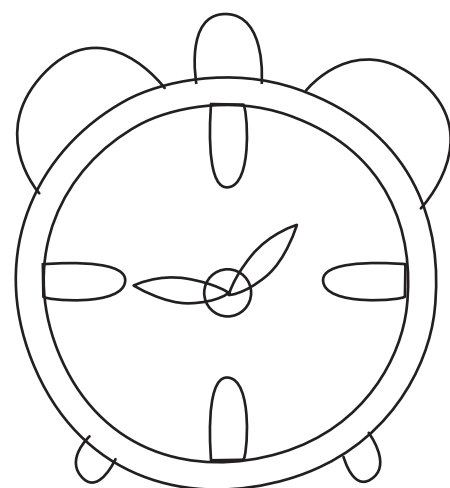
In every school, there is a school contact for AFS students. Sometimes this is a teacher, the principal or the student counsellor. The school contact's role is to help you with the relations you need to have in the school and help you design your program of study. You will get information about your school contact at Arrival camp.

Icelandic culture is probably very different from yours. Be aware of that and don't be scared if you don't comprehend some habits. Talk with the people and try to deal with the cultural differences.

AFS requires 90% attendance throughout the year. Some schools might have different rules but the AFS rule is the one that is valid. Requiring 90% attendance does not mean that you can skip classes. The 10% is a slack in case you get sick and cannot go to school. Some of our students have misunderstood our school system in relation to skipping classes. No one is going to punish you if you skip classes. Teachers might not even seem to care. But all of it is registered and finally, after some time, a student that skips classes might get a warning letter from school stating that if the student does not improve his attendance he will be expelled. In other cases, the headmaster might call the host family or AFS office with demands for reaction on our behalf.

Being expelled from school means early return from the AFS program.

It is important that you focus only on studying for the Icelandic school. Being an exchange student is stressful and difficult at times and studying for the Icelandic school and learning the language is enough. Please don't add to the stress by studying for other school in your home country.

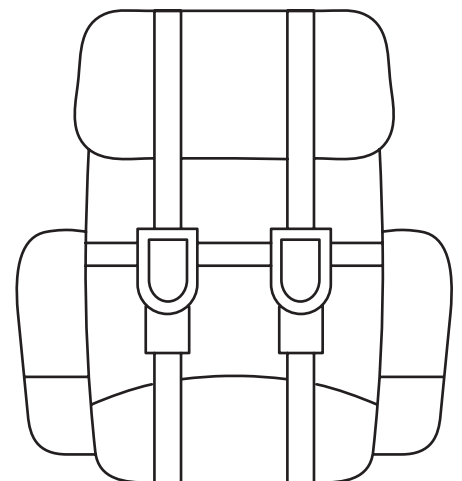


## 5. BEFORE LEAVING

### 5.1 PACKING AID

- warm overcoat
- raincoat
- boots and good walking shoes
- hat and gloves
- heavy sweaters
- warm socks
- bathing suit
- sport gear because at school you will attend sport classes
- nicer clothing
- jeans
- T-shirts and cotton sweaters
- Sneakers
- a sports bag for arrival camp: Soon after arrival in Iceland we will give you a short orientation. Please bring in a small bag what you need for one or two nights. Don't forget warm clothes and it is essential that you include one towel and your bathing suit.
- Be advised that if you need to take legal drugs, medically prescribed, it is wise to take a certificate from your medical doctor, in case you are stopped in customs.

- Note that it is not allowed to take food with you and AFS also likes to illustrate the importance of adapting to the host country dietary habits.
- Some students ask their parents to send them items from home. Most packages go through customs where you probably need to pay fee to claim the items.
  - ✓ Many things are probably much more expensive here in Iceland than in your country, so bring the clothes you think you'll need for your stay.
  - ✓ Our electrical system is 220-240 V, so if you want to bring any electrical equipment that is different you need to bring an adaptor with you.
  - ✓ Our TV system is PAL with VHS video. Region 2 for DVD players



## 5.2 REPRESENTING YOUR COUNTRY

An important part of your preparation before leaving is collecting information about your own country and continent. Try to imagine what sort of presentation you would wish to give of your country. It is useful, for example, to know what you do on special days, like birthdays, Christmas, national days etc. People will ask you many questions about your home and traditions. Get the basic facts clear, like names of important people, important dates in your country's history and standard of living etc. School facts can be useful, like knowing how your system is, what subjects are considered important and special school events.

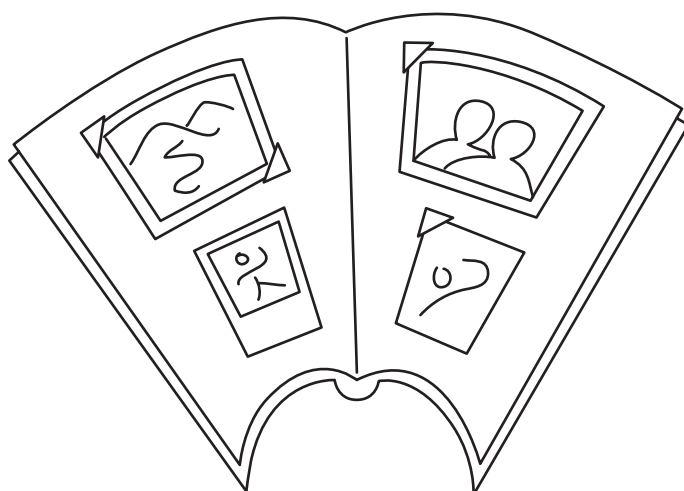
Things you can bring to make your introduction more vivid:

- Photos
- Brochures, postcards, video cassettes and maps to show what your country is like
- National music from your country
- Souvenirs
- Some favorite recipes, your Icelandic family will, occasionally, love to try your national food

## 5.3 POCKET MONEY

You are to bring your own pocket money, and we recommend that you bring US\$ 200 -250 a month to enable you to participate in various activities in school and your leisure time. If you need to buy or do something special you will need more, things can be very expensive in Iceland and few families are able to buy for the exchange student things like; clothes and shoes or to pay for music lessons, exercise classes etc. AFS Iceland requires that all the exchange students open a bank account soon after arrival. If you come from Europe or USA it is easy for your parents to transfer money to your account when necessary. For the others, credit cards are accepted in most places in Iceland and you can also use those to get money through bank automats. Please note that if you bring a credit card Visa and Eurocard are the ones most commonly used in Iceland.

Prices in Iceland	
Soda in a Café	4 US\$
Coffee in a Café	4 US\$
Hair cut	50 US\$
Levis jeans	160 US\$
Going to movies	15 US\$



## 6. BEING AN EXCHANGE STUDENT IN ICELAND

If you have met returnees, you hear that the AFS experience must feel like a great adventure. And it really is, but it is not the same kind of adventure as a tourist might find coming to our country. The tourist is always a spectator, the exchange student is a participant.

You will become a member of Icelandic society and this is the great adventure and the main purpose of your stay. People at home may feel that you should visit places, see this and see that, but in fact you will spend most of your time doing everyday things. Our mountains, rivers, deserts, glaciers and hot springs will not go away, but your opportunity to be an exchange student will only come around once in your life. Some of you will however travel with your families or your schools.

### 6.1 FACTS ABOUT AFS ICELAND

AFS began in Iceland in 1957, when the first Icelandic students went to the USA on the year program. AFS Iceland is a volunteer driven organisation. The National office is in Reykjavík. There are five staff members at the office, national director, three program staff and organisation development coordinator. The volunteers work closely with the office and organises activities for hosted students. The volunteers are mostly returnees, but sending parents, host parents and other people who are interested in the program are also involved.

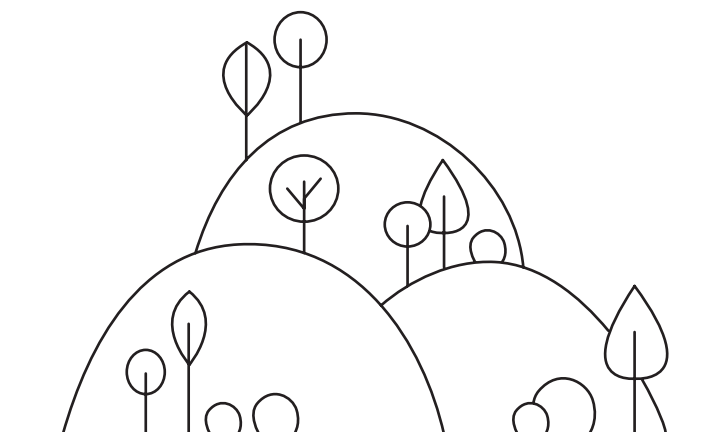
If there is anything you would like to know or you would wish to discuss with somebody outside your family you can turn to a member of the local chapter, staff of the national office or preferably your personal counsellor. AFS will find you and your family a contact person, a counsellor. Most of them are returnees who have been working with AFS. This makes it easier for them to understand you. It is important to have a good relationship with this person whose role is to be your friend and to be at your service whenever you have difficulties solving your problems.

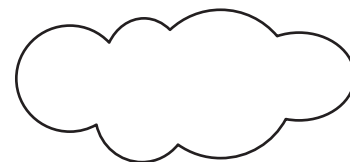
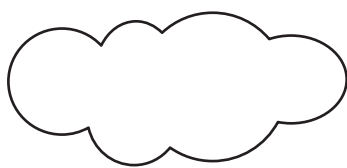
Remember that the counsellor is also the AFS contact person for your family. Counsellors have proved to be of tremendous help in difficult situations and to add a wider scope to the life of the exchange student. At Arrival camp you will get information about who your counsellor is and how to reach him/her.

- If your counselor does not contact you in the first week after your arrival don't hesitate to be the one to call first.
- Whenever you need to talk about something you don't wish to discuss with your family or friends, contact your counselor.
- If you and your family have a problem you cannot solve by yourselves, contact your counselor.

AFS will try to find a person at your school to help you, especially at the beginning. This person is not your counsellor and cannot be his/her substitute during your stay. Your school contact-person is there to help you to find your way around the school and introduce you to people. This is especially important in the bigger schools. Information about who is your contact person at school and how to reach him are given at the Arrival camp.

AFS Iceland sends each year about 120 exchange students on the Year Program, both to the Northern and Southern hemispheres. They go to European countries, North and South America, Australia and Asia. Usually we host around 40 students each year from Europe, North and South America and Asia. This year, however, we will host approx. 20 students.





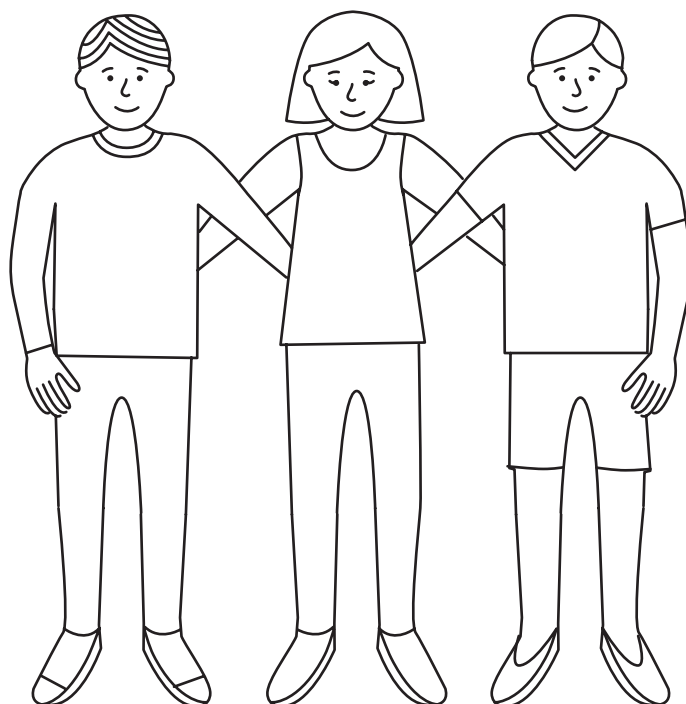
## 6.2 AFS ICELAND ORIENTATIONS

**Arrival Orientation.** Late August, duration 2 days. Orientation site is at a school that is a 40 minutes drive from the international airport. At this camp, the exchange students get to rest after their trip as well as getting to know each other and the staff and the volunteers of AFS Iceland. Besides this, the main goal of the orientation is to introduce AFS Iceland to hosted students and prepare them for their year in Iceland. Students in the capital area are picked up by their families at the orientation site. Other students leave for their communities by air and are met by host family/local volunteers there.

**Post-arrival orientation (6-Week Camp).** Early October, duration 3 days. An orientation for all the students who are hosted in the country. In this camp, the students get the opportunity to seek information from AFS Iceland and to discuss whatever they may be thinking regarding their stay in Iceland. We also try to discuss in groups the experience the students are going through. At 6-week camp we also have a training seminar for our new volunteers so this is a great opportunity for the foreign students to get to know people of their own age.

**Mid-Stay orientation (Culture weekend).** In March, duration 3-6 days. Usually a tri involved, destination differs from year to year. All the hosted students in the country travel together. At cultural weekend, we emphasize fun and cultural events.

**End-of-Stay Orientation.** June duration 1-2 days before departure. End-of-stay starts with host families and students planting trees in the „AFS-forest“. Then the students say goodbye to their families and spend their last days in the camp. There the students can spend their last days in Iceland together and say goodbye to each other. They also can do an evaluation of the year and prepare for returning to their homes.



## 7. PRACTICAL INFORMATION

### 7.1 MEDICAL EXPENSES

AFS will pay for medical expenses if they result from accidents or illnesses occurring during your stay in Iceland. Please take a receipt if you pay for any medical treatment and AFS will reimburse you. The easiest way to reimburse you is to transfer the money to your bank account. Therefore, we require all the exchange students to open a bank account in Iceland. AFS does not pay bills for dental care, eye glasses, inoculations, routine physical examinations or for conditions that existed prior to your departure to Iceland.

### 7.2 SCHOOL EXPENSES

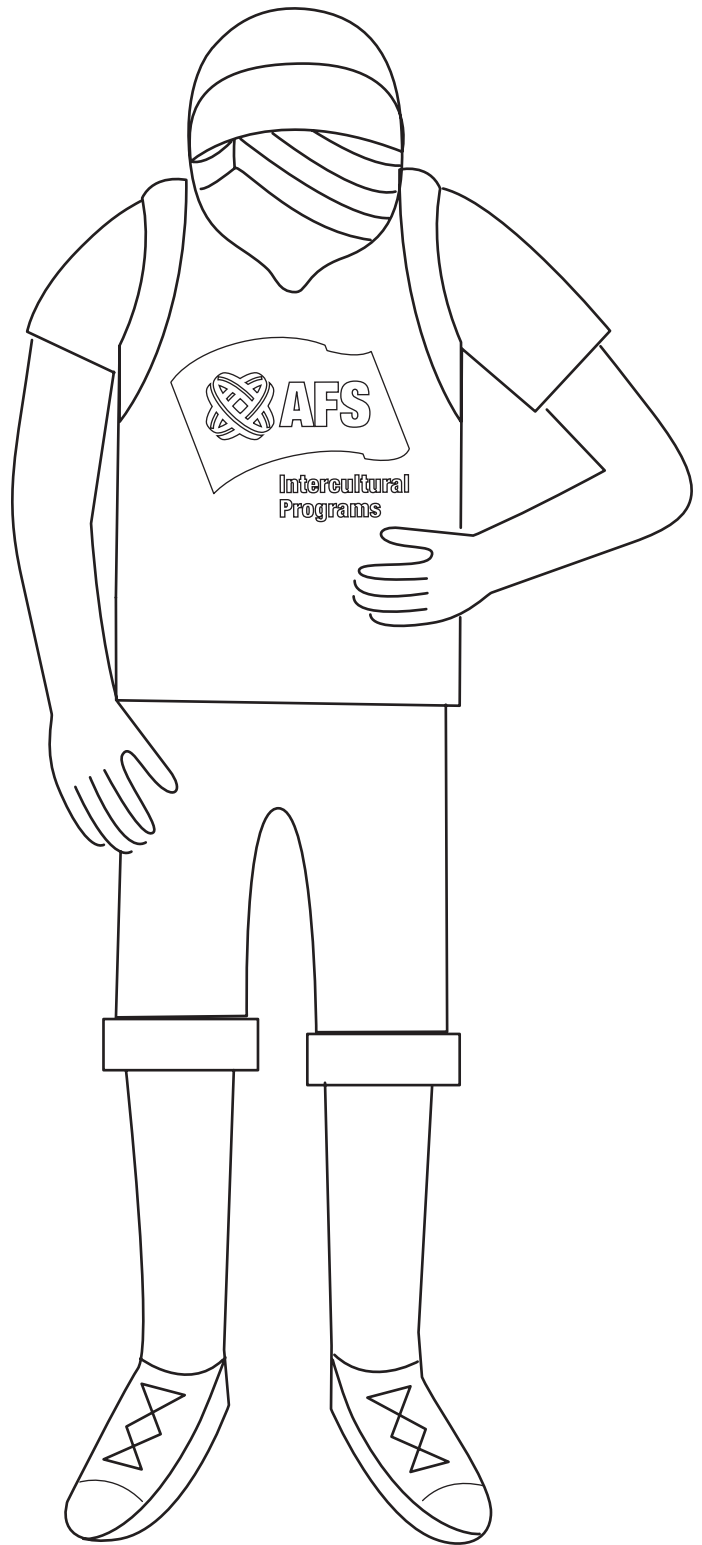
AFS Iceland pays school fees, text books and school fares.

### 7.3 TRAVELLING EXPENSES

AFS Iceland pays all the travelling cost of the exchange students when they are on a travel organized by AFS. If you must travel by bus to school then AFS will pay your tickets.

### 7.4 ALCOHOL

Consumption of alcohol is illegal for those under the age of 20 in Iceland. As you may see in the fifth rule of AFS (further back in this booklet) AFS students must obey the Icelandic law. Nevertheless, some Icelandic teenagers drink and you might be offered, or even pressured to drink especially at parties. Discuss with your family and contact person how to deal with these situations. Just remember that you do not have to drink. Teenage drinking is not socially acceptable in Iceland and drinking is not allowed at school dances.





## 8. SAFETY AROUND THE HOME

Your host family will probably not know what you are concerned or worried about. So, do not hesitate and ask them questions about safety: Can I go out alone at night? Are there areas I should not go to? etc. Although Iceland is a rather safe country, students should always be careful and ask their host family and local contact person for advice.

### 8.1 GENERAL SAFETY QUESTIONS

- What should I do if an emergency occurs? Whom should I call?
- Where do you keep the emergency telephone numbers?
- Do you have a first aid kit? Where is it?
- Do you have a fire extinguisher? Where is it?
- How do you secure the house?
- Do you lock your doors and windows? When do you do that?
- Am I going to have a house key?
- What do you advise me about answering the door when I am alone at home?
- How do I react when a stranger to the family is calling or visiting?

### 8.2 ANSWERING THE TELEPHONE

If you feel uncertain about answering the phone especially because you must answer in a foreign language, ask your family: How do I respond when answering the phone? What information should I give? What information should I not give?

### 8.3 ELECTRICITY

In Iceland, the voltage is 220V which is a high voltage and dangerous in cases of electric shock. You should especially watch out not to use electrical appliances when close to water.

### 8.4 WARM WATER

Geothermal heating meets the heating and hot water requirements of approximately 87% of all buildings in Iceland. Apart from geothermal energy, 73.8% of the nation's electricity was generated by hydro power, so keep in mind that water used to heat houses in Iceland is very hot – much hotter, for example, than heating water abroad. Water temperature commonly reaches 80° to 90°C (176°-194°F). Foreigners frequently do not realize this and suffer scalding so always show special care in your use of water. You should also be advised that since the hot water comes from a natural source it smells of Sulfur which takes some time to get used to.

The worst types of accidents happen when cooling is interrupted suddenly and unexpectedly, e.g. when cold water has not been turned on, or stops flowing, etc. NEVER let hot water get into contact with your skin without first checking its temperature.

## 9. SAFETY OUTSIDE THE HOME

### 9.1 TRANSPORTATION

In the following section, we will indicate some suggestions to you when using any kind of transportation:

#### 9.1.1 PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

In Iceland, our main public transportation are the buses. Use of public transportation is not very common by Icelanders and most people drive their private cars. It is not unusual for families to have 2 cars per household.

Public transportation with buses in Iceland is very safe, so do not worry about taking the bus. In many small towns there are no public transportations. Ask your host parents about the situation in your region. In general, there is no problem using public transportation whatsoever.

#### 9.1.2 WALKING

Walking is very common in Iceland and many people walk even longer distances. Walking outside may be safe, however, there might be areas that you should avoid especially at night. Ask your host family about these areas, since they know best which places are safe and which are not in their respective area. You should always let your host parents know whenever you are concerned or frightened. When going out, you should always let your host parents know or leave information at home about where you are going or a telephone number where you will be.

When walking alone late in the evening, try to walk on streets that are well lit and where other people are around. In general, you should take your host parents advice seriously and follow their recommendations.

#### 9.1.3 RIDING YOUR BICYCLE

In Iceland, you also have the option to ride a bicycle to go to school or just for fun. In some areas you will find bicycle lanes but those are still rare so be careful and ride your bike on the pavement if there are no special lanes.

During the wintertime, it can be difficult to ride the bike because of heavy snow and it can also get very slippery. AFS Iceland advice you to always wear a helmet when you ride your bike. Please ask your host family about traffic regulations in Iceland.

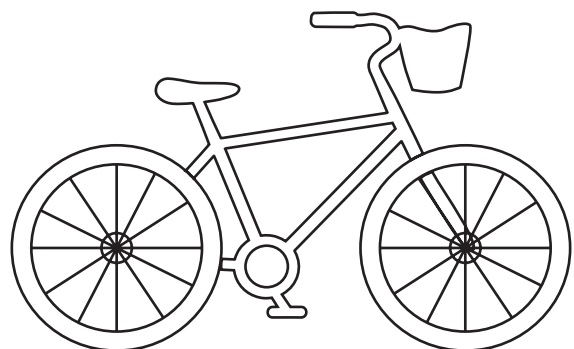
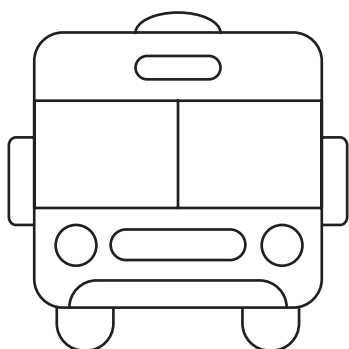
#### 9.1.4 TRAVEL BY CAR

AFS participants are not allowed to drive cars or any kinds of motorized vehicles. Do not get into a car with strangers or anyone you don't recognize. Hitch-hiking is strictly forbidden and can be dangerous. Participants either driving or hitch-hiking are dismissed from the program and must return home immediately.

During wintertime, you should be careful as a passenger accepting rides in a car that is not properly equipped for heavy snow or slippery roads. It is not safe to drive during wintertime on highways or country roads, except in a properly equipped car with winter tires. Car accidents are frequent in Iceland and one of the highest in the Scandinavian countries so it is important to be careful with whom you are driving. Seek some advice from your host family on this issue.

### 9.2 PUBLIC PLACES

Going to public places and walking around outside the house is usually safe. As stated before, be careful when walking alone late in the evening. There are also some areas which you should avoid (e.g. certain areas in Reykjavik). Again, do not hesitate to ask your host parents about the situation. In general, the same rule is always true: Try to find out some of the local security habits by talking to your host family.



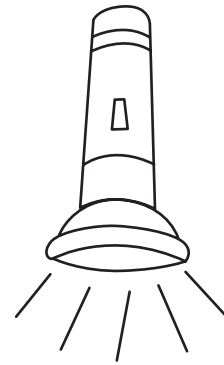
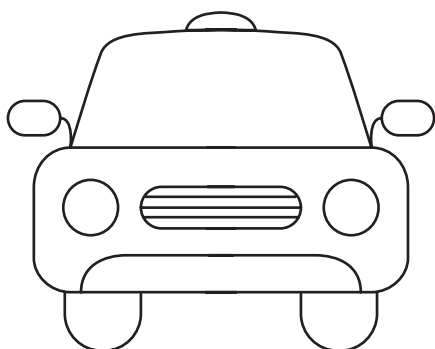
### 9.3 WEATHER

Iceland enjoys a much milder climate than its name and location adjacent to the Arctic-circle would imply. A branch of the Gulf Stream flows along the southern and the western coast greatly moderating the climate. However, this brings mild Atlantic air in contact with colder Arctic air resulting in a climate that is marked by frequent changes in weather and storminess. Furthermore, this leads to more rainfall in the southern and western part than in the northern part of the island.

"If you don't like the weather right now, just wait five minutes," people sometimes say in Iceland.

This is an indication of the strong variability of the Icelandic climate, where one may occasionally experience the four seasons over a day: sunshine and mild temperatures; windy, cool temperatures and rain; snow and temperatures below zero degrees C. When this happens (rarely), it is an expression of the location of Iceland at the border between Arctic and temperate seas, and between cold air masses of the Arctic and warm air masses of lower latitudes. Due to these fluctuations in the weather it is best to ask your host family when you are not sure what the appropriate outside clothes should be. Also, be advised that the weather can seem beautiful and warm from inside looking out but can be brisk and cold when you go outside with only a pullover.

Iceland's winters are mild with averages ranging from about -2-0,0°C (28- 32°F) and windy, while the summers are cool with averages ranging from about 10-12°C (50-54°F). There are some variations in the climate between different parts of Iceland. Sometimes, the south coast is warmer and windier than the north.

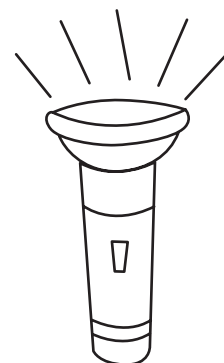


### 9.4 EARTHQUAKES

Occasionally earthquakes do occur in Iceland but are most often really small (2-4 on the Richter scale). If people follow the safety instructions, earthquakes are not fatal and in fact there are no cases of fatal earthquakes in the history of Iceland for the past hundred years. Injuries by earthquakes are in most cases caused by falling objects. That is why you must find a place where you are shielded for example under a table, in a doorway or a corner. It is also a good idea to avoid having shelves and other objects on the wall over your bed.

If an earthquake occurs follow these instructions:

- Find a safe place
- Kneel down
- Shield your head with your hands
- Try to grab on to something



## 10. OTHER IMPORTANT ISSUES

### 10.1 DRUGS

Unfortunately, illegal drugs are accessible in Iceland and the target group is your age group. Like everywhere else in the world, drug dealers see teenagers as a profitable market and try to reach out to them to gain money. Keep in mind that the availability of drugs does not change the fact that they are illegal and dangerous. According to the international rule of AFS the use of any kind of illegal drugs or substances by its students results in immediate dismissal from the program and return to the home country. This is true even if drugs are no exception at the student's school. If you are concerned about this issue, talk with your host family or local consultant about it. In Iceland, there are also several associations that can give you information or counseling on drug issues. The simplest answer to this however is: NO!!!

### 10.2 WEAPONS

It is illegal in Iceland to carry weapons in public or to own weapons in general, unless you have a special permit given by legal authorities. By weapons we mean knives, guns etc. Police officers and security officers don't carry weapons in public. Failure to comply with this rule will result in immediate dismissal from the AFS program and return to the home country.

### 10.3 THEFT

Be careful not to leave your wallet, money or other valuables unobserved in school or other public places. Although pocket theft is rare, it is wiser to be careful how you leave your things. iPods, laptops and cell phones are, if left unattended, commonly stolen and easily sold. The best thing is not to take things of great value to school or at least not leave them unattended. Please keep in mind if someone is trying to sell you valuable things like those mentioned above, that those might be stolen and if you try to leave the country with stolen goods, you might get trouble with customs authorities.

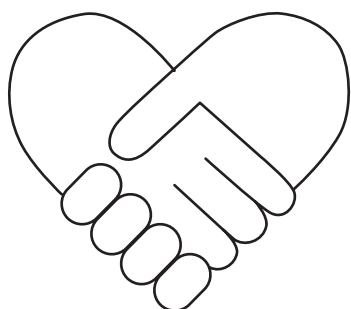
### 10.4. CONSUMPTION OF ALCOHOL

It is against the law to buy or consume alcohol - wine, spirits and beer - if you are younger than 20 years old. In addition, it is against the AFS rules to consume alcohol at all during your exchange year. Some students have heard the myth that they can have beer or wine if they don't get drunk. We would like to remind you that those stories are not true.

### 10.5 LAWS AND REGULATIONS

Participants and their natural parents are fully responsible for damages caused by the participants to third parties and any cost involved about such claims. AFS does NOT assume any legal liability for the participants.

AFS students are subject to the law of their host country. Neither AFS nor the national government of the student's home country can protect the student from punishment with respect to drugs, theft and other illegal offenses.



## 10.6 SEXUAL BEHAVIOR

AFS trusts you to be sexually responsible. Keep in mind that your sexual behavior can affect your host family's life and AFS' reputation.

Remember you can always get advice from the school nurse and condoms can be bought in any pharmacy or supermarket.

In some situations, you may be unsure if you are being sexually harassed or if the other person is just being very friendly. The best thing to do is to speak to your host family or local AFS volunteers to see what they think, and they will be able to tell you what to do. You should not feel pressured to do anything sexually you do not want to do.

Female teenagers often get a lot of attention from the opposite sex and may find themselves spoken to in the street by people they don't know. Most of the time this is nothing to worry about, but it is best to discuss with your female friends to determine the best way to react.

There may be situations in crowds where students may feel they are receiving unwanted attention. The best way to deal with this is to move away and if the problem continues, to protest loudly to intimidate the person and alert others. In the event of an actual assault you should immediately notify your host parents who will take the necessary measures.

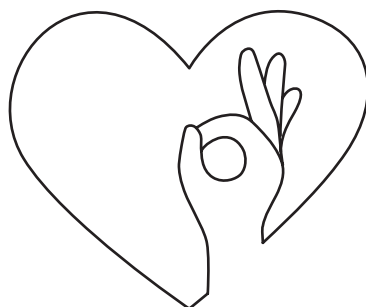
Whenever you feel unsafe, or think you are being followed, do not panic!

Your best move is to enter the nearest shop or restaurant, explain what is happening to you and ask to call your host family or AFS emergency number.

## 10.7 AIDS

AIDS means "Acquired Immunity Deficiency Syndrome". Still today there is no medication to cure this illness and AIDS is always deadly. However, AIDS is transmitted only by exchange of bodily fluids through intercourse. AIDS is NOT transmitted by other contacts such as drinking or eating from somebody else's glass or plate, touching, kissing, etc.

Sexually active participants should be careful to use of condoms whenever having intercourse. The contraceptive pill is not a protection against AIDS.



## 10.8 POLICE, AUTHORITIES AND EMERGENCIES

Occasionally, the police may check and question people either in the street or on the road. If this happens to you, there is nothing to worry about. Show respect and cooperation with authorities, even though you may be innocent of any crime and think that you are being treated unfairly.

If you do not understand what is being said, tell the police and tell them that you are an exchange student. Always carry your residence permit for foreigners. This is important not only in the event of being questioned by authorities, but also in the unfortunate event of a personal accident.

In any kind of an urgent emergency (accident, crime, etc.) the best is to call the police first. Below, you will find the most important emergency number (any abuse of this number is punishable by law):

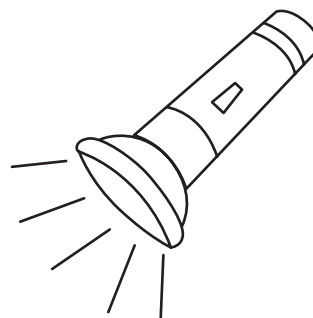
EMERGENCY NUMBER: 112

Also call your host family, the local contact person or the AFS national office. The number of AFS Iceland is: 552-54-50. After working hours (10 a.m. to 4 p.m.) you can leave a message on the answering machine. In case of a emergency after working hours, you can also call

AFS EMERGENCY NUMBER:  
(+354) 897-9187

Your host family can also reach an AFS staff by these numbers.

In case of a national emergency the student should follow the advice of the government or the local authorities. The national AFS office will immediately contact the students to provide necessary help.



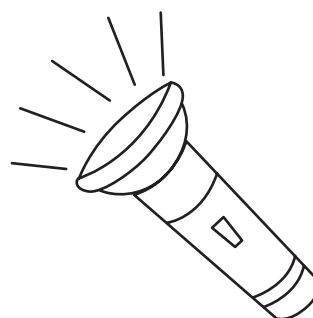
## 11. SAFETY CONCLUSION

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

- Get to know the host culture well through questions, dialogue and discussion with your host family, peers, AFS local contacts, AFS camp leaders, etc.
- Take seriously any concerns that your host family and school have expressed and follow their advice.
- Remember: Ask about your concerns!

AFS Iceland info!

Address: Skipholt 50C, 4<sup>th</sup> floor, 105 RVK  
Telephone: (+354)-552-5450  
E-mail: [info-isl@afs.org](mailto:info-isl@afs.org)  
Website: [www.afs.is](http://www.afs.is)





## 12. AFS RULES

### 1. TRIPS

Independent travel is not permitted unless on rare occasion under special conditions and with the explicit permission of the office of AFS Iceland. Besides that, we need the permission of your host family and your natural parents for independent travel. A general letter from your natural parents giving you permission for the whole year is NOT VALID. Your natural parents must fill in AFS Program Waiver Form from the national offices, other forms will not be accepted. The approval for your trip is necessary before you finalise your travel plans

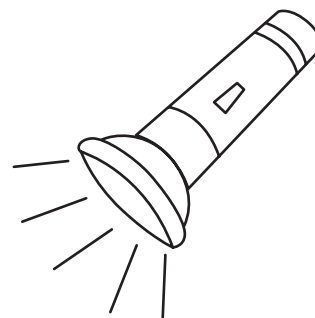
- Travelling with your own host family or school is permitted but you should always inform your counsellor or the AFS office in advance about when you will leave, when you will return and the full address at which you can be reached
- Independent travel is generally not allowed during school term.
- Hitchhiking is strictly forbidden.
- Students cannot fly in an airplane unless on a scheduled flight. Flying with charter flight or private planes is prohibited unless with a written permission from natural parents.
- Travelling outside of Iceland is not permitted. The only time AFS Iceland permits such trips is if your host family is going abroad and wants you to go with them, or if your school is organising a class trip outside the country. Your natural parents must fill in AFS Program Waiver Form from the national offices, other forms will not be accepted. The approval for your trip is necessary before you finalise your travel plans.

### 2. DRIVING

During your year in Iceland you're not allowed to drive any type of motorized vehicle that requires a license although you might have a license at home.

### 3. DRUGS

The use, possession or dealing with any kind of drugs other than medically prescribed is illegal and therefore strictly forbidden.



### 4. VISITS FROM RELATIVES OR FRIENDS

AFS Iceland does not allow visits from friend or relatives from your own country.

### 5. THE ICELANDIC LAW

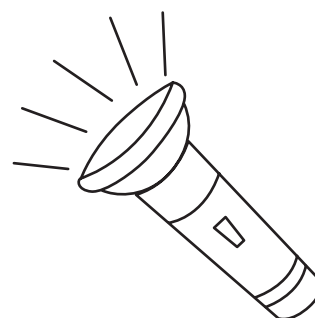
AFS and its students have no immunity from the Icelandic law.

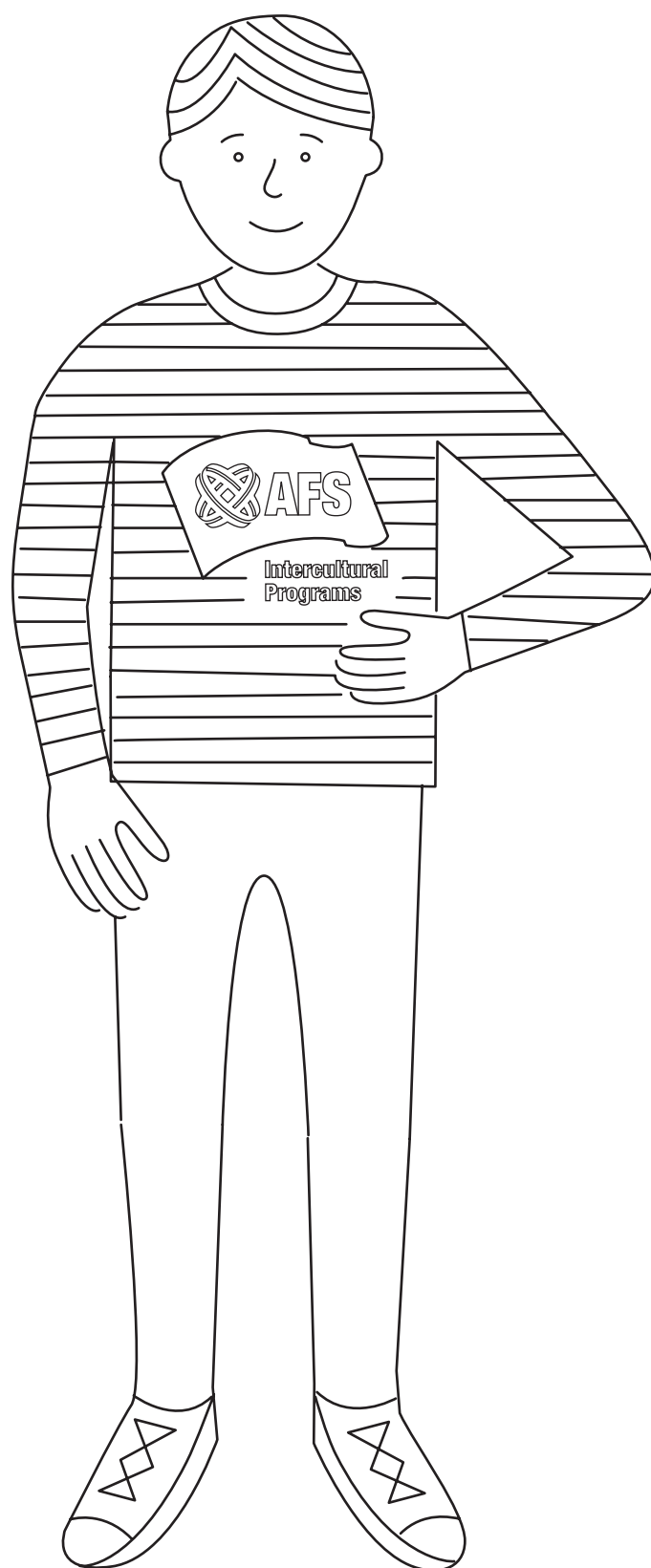
AFS Iceland will not accept a Program Release at the end of the program unless the natural families are coming to Iceland to stay with their kids after end of stay.

Iceland has signed the Schengen Treaty where AFS Iceland will remain responsible for our AFS students when they travel outside Iceland. AFS Iceland also has an agreement with the Immigration authorities in Iceland, that our students will leave the country no later than on the original international departure date. The only exception is if natural parents come and meet the student in Iceland at the end of the program and further travelling is desired (not staying with the host-family). In that case, we need a signed PR with the student's last date of the program. The natural parents and the AFS-student are responsible for the return travel and a possible visa for entering other European countries.

These rules are set to make the AFS year safe and rewarding for you and your host family.

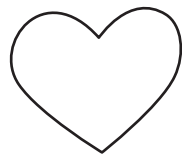
If you break the rules you risk being sent home before your AFS year is over





### 13. ICELANDIC COURSES ON LINE

1. <http://tungumalatorg.is/ifa/>
2. Choose Íslenska fyrir alla 1

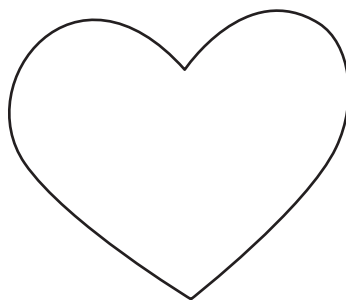


We are looking forward to welcoming you here in Iceland.

Collect your dreams, your courage, your energy and enthusiasm and be prepared to live one of the most incredible adventures of your life!

See you soon!

Staff and volunteers of AFS Iceland



AFS.IS

