



How to Interview Host Families for AFS Interculture South Africa

AFS is an international volunteer organisation that provides Intercultural learning opportunities, helping people develop the knowledge, skills, understanding and bonds needed to create a more just and peaceful world.

About AFS

Since 1947, AFS has been an international leader in student exchange. We pioneered the concept of bringing high school students from around the world to the U.S. for a year to live with a host family and attend school.

Today students from over 50 countries come to the South Africa for a year or a semester. And AFS sends qualified positive students abroad to live for a year, a semester, or a summer in 48 countries around the globe.

The AFS experience is not a glamorous travel adventure for tourists. AFS is an opportunity to participate in a family, a community, and (in many cases) a school—and to look at our world through a new pair of eyes.

Intercultural learning, the goal of AFS, is achieved when participants are immersed in a new environment which challenges them to learn new languages and new customs and to form new relationships with people from different backgrounds.

AFS has 50 years of experience in the field, with a large grassroots volunteer core to assist with appropriate placements of foreign students with S.A. families. Volunteerism is the hallmark of the AFS organization.

Congratulations!

You have found a family interested in hosting an AFS student! The next step in this exciting process is the family interview. This guide can help ensure that the interview provides for a valuable exchange of information and is an enjoyable experience for everyone. After all, you are helping to create a relationship that can last a lifetime.

It's a good idea to take a volunteer or another person whose judgment you trust with you—that way you can make sure to remember to ask all the important questions and discuss the best type of student for placement in the family!

The assessment and interview must be held in the family's home with all family members present. Careful recruitment, assessment, interview and placement are what sets AFS apart from the rest. AFS host families are our most important resource and our community volunteers of tomorrow.

During the interviewing process you can provide families with realistic information about hosting and the AFS program. By using good judgment and taking enough time in the interview you can:

- | Learn about the family's values, interests and patterns of daily life. This understanding will help you in making accurate placement recommendations;
- | Begin the family's orientation to the AFS experience;
- | Cover thoroughly all hosting options available to the family (first family, two family placement, move family, full year family);
- | Determine if the family's placement needs can be met. Reinforce the history, mission, and volunteer commitment to AFS programs.

What Types of Questions Should I Ask?

Here is a short list of categories to use in framing your questions:

1. **Who will live in the home during the AFS experience?**
2. **What are the family's intellectual, physical, and cultural interests?** Are they pursued individually or by the family as a whole? How often? What expectations does the family have for the AFS student's participation in these interests? What types of the student's interests will the family enjoy sharing?
3. **How are family decisions made?** To what extent do the children share in the decision making?
4. **What are specific examples of rules and expectations that parents choose for teenagers?** How much flexibility will there be in accommodating an AFS student who is accustomed to independence and decision making?
5. **How is conflict or disagreement dealt with in the family?** How do they resolve problems?
6. **Are there any unusual circumstances in the family which are currently present or anticipated to occur during the AFS experience?** Illness? Unemployment or severe changes in economic status? High levels of parental rigidity and authoritarianism? An adult child returning to live at home?
7. **How is transportation to school and activities handled?** Will the family and their network of friends help the AFS student get to activities?
8. **What is the family's religious affiliation, if any?** What role does religion play in their daily lives? To what extent will they want/expect an AFSer to take part in their religious practice? How would the family feel about hosting a student with a different or no religious affiliation?

Tips For Positive Interviews

- | *Set the tone, be relaxed, and encourage the family to be comfortable and relaxed in turn.*
- | *Be sure to convey warmth, openness and honesty.*
- | *Be prepared to listen.*
- | *Reinforce that any response is permitted and all information gathered during the interview process is kept strictly confidential.*
- | *Ask open-ended questions which require input of all family members.*
- | *Be aware of the family's spontaneous interactions. Family interaction is as important as answers as it gives good insight into a family's placement needs.*
- | *Using scenario situations is sometimes more effective than direct questions. For instance, "Your son or daughter has a midnight curfew and doesn't come home until 1 A.M. What would you do?"*
- | *Involving the children in the questions is an important way to see how the family structure works.*

9. **How long have the parents been married?**
Is the relationship stable and able to accommodate the normal stresses involved in assimilating an exchange student into the family?
10. **What types of involvement does the family have in the community?** Is their life busy due to activities and friends or do they tend to remain uninvolved?
11. **What is your first and last impression of the home?** Is it neat and orderly or more disorganized? Is it overly tidy or does it have the "lived in" look?
12. **Have the family describe a typical day in their home from the time they rise until they retire.**

Some Final Thoughts on the AFS Interview Process

- | Use humor during the interview and look for humor and flexibility in family relationships.
- | Explain there are no guarantees; hosting is a human situation and it doesn't work smoothly all the time. Let them know what to expect from their student/family liaison and describe the community support system in place.
- | Thoroughly cover the orientation process. Explain the pre-arrival orientation for host parents and the orientation their AFS student will attend immediately after his or her arrival in the region and prior to coming to live with them. Explain how important it is for families and students to attend the regularly scheduled orientations throughout the year. Also cover some highlights of AFS activities which are usually held during the year.
- | Take time to chat with the family after the interview is concluded. Leave your phone number in case they have further questions, and let them know when the next community AFS meeting will be held and invite them to come.
- | Remember that the interview is generally the time to "close the sale." Be sure to answer their questions about hosting honestly but at the same time sharing with them the benefits of hosting. Perhaps bring along a previous or current host parent to share some insight with them.
- | It's okay to say no. Not all families are in a position to host an AFS student. If your chapter does not feel a particular family would provide a successful hosting experience, perhaps ask them to be a temporary family for a student who is moving, or an aunt/uncle or liaison family. If you feel uncomfortable rejecting a family for fear of creating bad feelings, consult your AFS office. They will assist in communicating with the family in a way that exonerates the local chapter.
- | It's okay to ask them to commit to helping with the chapter during their hosting year. This can include fundraisers, transportation to and from AFS events, or other local activities. Remember that the AFS experience is more than just hosting a student or going abroad. Families new to the area might enjoy meeting new people.
- | Hosting is hard work, but it's also **fun!** Try to make sure people enjoy themselves, both volunteers and host families.

AFS Interculture South Africa

National Hosting Coordinator

Janine White

Physical Address:
7 – 9 Keyes Avenue
Parklands Centre
2121
Johannesburg Gauteng
Telephone: 011 447 2673

Postal Address:
PO Box 753
Parklands
2121
Johannesburg, Gauteng
Fax: 011 447 2693

