



## 1.- Introduction

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Congratulations! You've decided to come to Spain with an AFS program... That's good news for us! We wish you all the best with lots of wonderful experiences and we are eager to meet you! But before you arrive, we would like to highlight **some important aspects of your program that will help to make it a huge success.**

You should bear in mind that everything you've already learnt about Spain may now strike with the reality you will be living. **Spain has very diverse** traditions, weather, landscapes, ways of communication and even different languages! There are several languages recognized as official which are commonly used at High Schools or even in families' daily lives, these are: Galician, Catalan, Valencian and Basque. We'd also like you to make the effort and learn about Spain's current affairs or what's on in news in both, your newspapers or in Spanish local newspapers, websites, etc. This way you'll become aware of our different cultures and have lots of information before you arrive.

**Spain is more** than the usual stereotypes you've probably heard of... party, siesta, bullfighting or football. We're sure you'll fall in love with our country and its people ...and it is more than likely that you want to come back again soon. If this is the case, you really made your experience a success!

## 2.- The Arrival

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There is not a unique way of communication in Spain. People act differently whether they are at public places (high school, big groups of friends) or in private ones (at home, in family).

It is vital that you **observe rather than act** - especially at the beginning. You can place questions whenever you have doubts and **ask** your tutor or host family **for advice**. They'll be pleased to help you understand lots of things and we're sure you'll laugh after the first misunderstandings are clarified.

We Spaniards have a very farsighted, hierarchical and collectivist society. There is not one single Spanish nature but we can assure you that **we are supportive people** in general - this becomes more remarkable at small villages and towns where neighbourly relationships are strong. When you are in contact with people in the beginning you may realize at first that your sheer presence stirs up curiosity: we beg you neither to live it as an intrusion in

your privacy nor to feel yourself questioned. As soon as the people around you get to know you a bit more they will leave you your own space. You just need to understand that you will be a **new friend for them they want to get to know**.

You must ask your tutor every concern, doubt or question that you may have regarding Spanish culture or whenever you have problems to adapt. As long as you communicate in a proactive way, we can assure you that Spaniards are very welcoming and respectful people, hence the amount of questions will be less than you expect. Trust your tutor's role during your time in Spain and bear in mind that an **AFS tutor is a support contact during your program**, someone to turn to any time you feel blue or simply when you need to understand things. Your tutor will help you to learn a lot of things and guide you through your experience!

### 3. - Family Life

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Here are some basic things you need to know...

a. Spanish families love to have lunch together - especially on weekends. On Sundays there will be usually more guests as both family, members and friends, may come for lunch. It is also typical to visit the grandparent's house on Sundays. **Lunchtime is, in brief, a symbolic family gathering**, therefore you should not leave the table until everyone has finished. Either way you should not start eating before the others do.

b. Families appreciate every moment shared together. That's why you shouldn't close the door to your room unless you're sleeping or changing your clothes. **Join everyone** in the living room or the place most commonly used by all the family members.

c. As far as hygiene and order are concerned, Spanish mothers still do most of the homework and some may not have another job than being housewife but this does not mean they must arrange your untidiness or mess. **Families appreciate their sons' and daughters' own independence as regards order and care for things**. Equally, they like common shared rooms (baths, living-room and kitchen) to be always in the best of conditions. You should make your own bed every day, preferably before you go to class in the morning.

d. Spanish **people love to think positive** and thus appreciate random acts of kindness such as a smile and the usual 'thanks', every day. At home, in your High School, with your teachers, friends, brothers, parents...show the best of your smiles and **pay attention to your non-verbal expression** because a rude gesture, for example, if the served food is not of your taste. A bad gesture or comment is an insult to the person that has taken the time to cook it for you. You should, instead, smile and say that although it looks delicious you'd rather eat something else. **Be always kind!**

e. Don't wait to be asked to do your homework, make your bed or prepare that typical salad/dish you committed to make for dinner someday. Anticipate yourself to other people wishes, show respect and pay attention. Active listening and empathy will help you to create a nice environment at home. Also, in Spain, we like to say '**don't wait until tomorrow what you can do today**'.

f. One of our distinguishable characteristics of identity in AFS is that we are not a language academy but you should **help your brothers in their daily homework** if that is necessary. Don't forget your responsibilities as a brother.

## 4. - At High School...

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✓ **You should show interest in class.** You may find difficulties in History, Language, Literature or Philosophy especially at the beginning but you'll soon catch up. Do not hesitate to ask when the class has finished (or during the class by raising a hand) if you don't get something you consider important.



- ✓ If you are having problems understanding your subjects you should know that it's the most common thing. You're in a different country! Just get a grip and **rely on your High School Counsellor**. On your first day you can introduce yourself to him or her or ask a tutor to get you two in touch.
- ✓ Your English teacher may ask you for help and collaboration in class, e.g. by encouraging your classmates to talk to you. That is the normal thing at the beginning and some of them may ask you for help with their homework. A good way to start a new friendship!! It is **also common that your classmates request your notes or ask you for help with a subject...you can do the same** although someone will surely lend you a hand in advance.
- ✓ **In Spain education is not very interactive.** Teachers give the class and ask pupils to work individually or in groups. Giving a presentation is also common but you should always follow your teacher's guidelines. **Exams are very important** and you should try to pass them in the best way you can.
- ✓ **Treat your teacher with respect.** Don't be surprised if your classmates call the teacher by his/her first name. That is the common behaviour in Spanish High Schools. You can address him or her as 'profesor' or 'profesora' and although your counsellor and other teachers don't give you classes you should also call them 'profesor/a'.
- ✓ Depending on your location you may notice a higher or lower presence of immigrants in class. Try to learn from their experiences and consider that **they are part of the diversity of our country** (you'll notice there are grocery stores from foreign countries and shops with signs in Arabic, Chinese, etc...)

We hope that all these tiny hints will help you in the beginning! We are sure that your proactive attitude will help you to have a successful AFS Program.

We are looking forward meeting you soon!!

