



Connecting Lives, Sharing Cultures

Welcome book & Safety tips



In French-speaking Belgium
School Programs

www.afsbelgique.be

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Important contact information.....</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>W E L C O M E!</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>GETTING READY TO LEAVE HOME</i>	<i>8</i>
ARRIVAL IN BELGIUM	8
LANGUAGE	8
LANGUAGE COURSES	8
KNOWLEDGE OF BELGIUM AND OF YOUR OWN COUNTRY	8
WHAT TO BRING WITH YOU	8
<i>LIFE IN BELGIUM.....</i>	<i>10</i>
ATTITUDES	10
YOUR FAMILY	11
EVERYDAY LIFE.....	12
<i>AFS RULES.....</i>	<i>16</i>
INTERNATIONAL RULES.....	16
BELGIAN RULES.....	16
<i>IF.....</i>	<i>18</i>
YOU GO ON A TRIP.....	18
YOU BECOME SICK.....	18
YOU GET HOMESICK	18
YOU FEEL UNHAPPY	18
AN EMERGENCY ARISES.....	18
<i>AFS BELGIUM AND YOU</i>	<i>19</i>
THE ORGANISATION.....	19
THE LOCAL CHAPTERS.....	19
AFS ACTIVITIES	19
THE OFFICE.....	19
<i>GOING TO SCHOOL.....</i>	<i>20</i>
SCHOOLS.....	20
THE SCHOOL SYSTEM.....	21
LANGUAGES	21
AFS SCHOOL REPORT	21
<i>BELGIUM IN EUROPE</i>	<i>22</i>
LOCATION	22
GEOGRAPHY	22
WATERWAYS	23
CLIMATE	23

ECONOMY	23
GOVERNMENT.....	23
SAFETY TIPS	25
Personal safety concerns	25
In or around the home.....	26
Outside the home	26
At school	27
Illegal drugs, alcohol abuse	28
<i>Illegal drugs and substance</i>	28
<i>Alcohol</i>	28
Sexuality	29
Sexual harassment.....	29
LGBTQ	30
EMERGENCIES.....	30
<i>In case of security issues or terrorist alert</i>	30
<i>Insurance</i>	30
Conclusion	31

Important contact information

AFS Programmes interculturels ASBL
Boulevard du Triomphe 173/ 2
1160 Auderghem
Tél. 02/743.85.40
Fax 02/743.85.50
www.afsbelgique.be

Host family

Name(s): _____

Phone number: _____

Address: _____

Local liaison

Name(s): _____

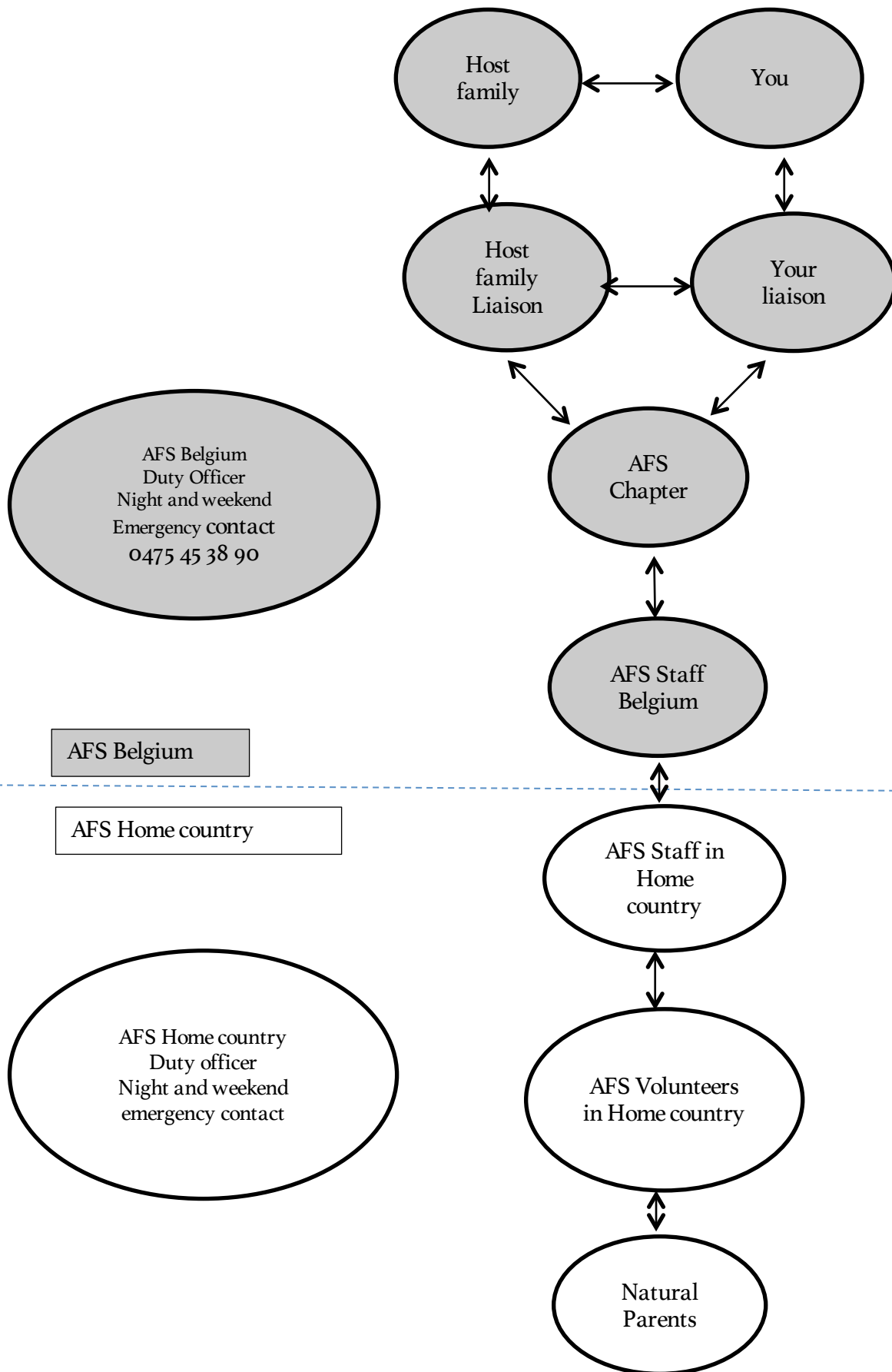
Phone number: _____

E-mail: _____

Emergency phone numbers

<i>AFS emergency line</i>	<i>0475 / 45 38 90</i>
<i>Emergency number in Belgium and all EU countries</i>	<i>112</i>
<i>Police department</i>	<i>101</i>
<i>Emergency medical help and firemen</i>	<i>100</i>
<i>Anti-poison centre</i>	<i>070 / 245 245</i>
<i>Doctor</i>	

AFS Chain of Communication



W E L C O M E !

AFS Programmes interculturels welcomes you to **French-speaking Belgium!** We congratulate you on your AFS scholarship and we are looking forward to seeing you soon! We hope you will "develop the ability to recognize other people as equal individuals, see their problems, feel a responsibility towards humanity and act accordingly". As you can see, AFS concerns itself with the problems of today's world peace, communication, sensitivity and tolerance.

The aims are high, but be careful not to expect a "Magic Stay". You will lead an ordinary life here. An ordinary Belgian life is experiencing everyday life with your host family. There will be a lot of new and different things, but it is up to you to make your stay special.

There will be giving and taking, understanding and making oneself understood, talking and listening. **You have the tools to make the most of your stay: your openness, your ability to look, to listen and to record, your diplomacy, your criticism, your charm and eagerness to try new things, your talents and your potential, for which you have been accepted as an AFSer.**

Develop these qualities and put them to use! This way, not only will your stay be special, but your latter life will have really benefited from your time here as when you see how you can tear down the cultural barriers with your Belgian family, you will be able to cross barriers at home, be it in your own family, your community or your own society.

The **AFS Programmes interculturels** committee is made up mainly of returnees and former host families. We have been through the AFS experience and know about other difficulties you may encounter. Thus, we have prepared this booklet to give you a little bit of advice getting ready for your trip and during your stay in our country. We urge you to read it carefully. We would also like you to pay attention to the pages about safety tips to avoid some potential difficulties you might face. These pages are very important so read them carefully!

We will be there to help you personally during your stay with anything that comes up. So keep in touch - we are looking forward to having you in Belgium!

AFS Programmes interculturels ASBL
Boulevard du Triomphe 173/ 2
1160 Auderghem
Tél. 02/743.85.40
Fax 02/743.85.50
www.afsbelgique.be

GETTING READY TO LEAVE HOME

A school year abroad is short. The better you are prepared, the more you can make of it. Language preparation and knowledge about Belgium and your own country are both very important. Of course, you should consider carefully what to bring with you before you pack your suitcase.

ARRIVAL IN BELGIUM

Upon arrival, students will be split into Flemish and French-speaking groups and will be taken to their own arrival orientation camp. This orientation will last three days, it will give you the opportunity to get basic information on how to manage during the first days... With Belgium being a small country, the transfer to your local community will be easy: your family will come to pick you up at the orientation site at the end of the weekend.

LANGUAGE

You will stay in French-speaking Belgium which means either in Brussels or in the southern part of the country (Dutch is spoken in the northern part).

To make your integration easier, we highly recommend you start or keep learning French while you are still at home. Your AFS program has already begun so get ready to “immerse” yourself in a new environment by learning the language.

If you have a poor knowledge of French, be sure to bring a pocket dictionary and a grammar book. This is especially important for school programs because you will need to understand the grammatical explanations and structure of French.

LANGUAGE COURSES

You'll benefit from a budget of 150 euros (reimbursement on presentation of a bill to our office) to attend French classes somewhere in your host community. To be reimbursed, your classes have to start during the first trimester. Your host family or/and your AFS contact can surely help you find the appropriate courses in the neighbourhood. These courses can be spread over several months.

KNOWLEDGE OF BELGIUM AND OF YOUR OWN COUNTRY

During our orientation camp we will hold discussions and give you more information about Belgium, but please do some research before you arrive. Make use of any libraries and internet resources that are available to you and if you have any time, try writing to embassies, tourist offices or information centres. Also, bring yourself up to date on national and world affairs by reading newspapers and newsmagazines.

WHAT TO BRING WITH YOU

• DOCUMENTS

*Make sure you have a valid passport and entry visa (if needed) to enter Belgium. You will receive all information concerning travel documents from your AFS office. **It can take several months to get a visa approved, so please start with your application as soon as possible.***

*If you are **under 18**, you will need a **legalised parental authorisation to travel** as well! You will receive the necessary document together with the visa information. You will need this document if you want to travel in Europe, so don't hand it over to the authorities when you leave your home country, bring it with you.*

• CLOTHING

Clothing is no big issue. The Belgian teenagers dress very casually, a wardrobe consisting of a change of clothes for every day is not necessary.

If you are in contact with your Belgian family before you leave, you might ask them for suggestions, as they may want to take you to places or do things that require specific clothing.

*Knowing a little about the Belgian climate might, however, help you pick out what to bring along. In the summer it is mostly warm and sunny, but also windy and rainy. The temperature during the summer months - from May to September - varies from 15 to 25° C. In the coldest winter months temperatures drop below freezing. It's rather cold as it is windy and rainy. You must take a **winter coat, warm sweaters, warm shoes and a raincoat.***

Remember also that current fashion in Northern Europe, South America, San Francisco, Ohio, New York, etc. may not be the same in Belgium. So try to avoid buying too many new clothes.

• MISCELLANEOUS

- 1. Bring a camera! It will help you with your speeches when you return home.*
- 2. It is a good idea to bring some of your favourite recipes with you. Your Belgian family will love sampling foreign food and it saves the trouble of having to write home to ask for them.*
- 3. Don't forget to bring "hometown information" i.e. pictures of your home, your family, your neighbourhood, your friends.*
- 4. You probably want to bring some small presents to your host family. The best suggestion we can give you is to use your imagination and try wandering through the aisles of your favourite department store. You will be surprised how many clever, thoughtful things you will find. Your family will love anything that is typical of your country.*
- 5. Don't forget to bring a towel, washcloth and soap with you, for the orientation days.*
- 6. Sports clothing: bring special clothes and shoes with you. AFS does not reimburse sports outfit and gear.*
- 7. A good pocket French dictionary.*

LIFE IN BELGIUM

Here are some tips on how to behave in general, how to act with your host family, and customs that might be new to you.

ATTITUDES

**** LANGUAGE***

*Some of you have a good knowledge of French, some of you only know the basics. However, for all of you **the language is of great importance and will need your immediate attention**. We don't need to stress how much you will be missing out if you do not make progress in the language. Push yourself in trying to speak to people in their language. The feeling of accomplishment and happiness when you are able to communicate with someone is tremendous! Set up a routine of studying a bit every day.*

Don't resent your host brother's or sister's attempts to practice their school English or Spanish on you. But do talk about this in the very beginning because it can be detrimental to you learning the language. One solution that many AFSers have found to be satisfactory is reserving about an hour's time when they help brothers and sisters with foreign languages: they learned quite a bit about French and Dutch and English themselves during those hours. The rest of the time only French was spoken.

**** ACCEPTING DIFFERENCES***

*Subtle differences are often stumbling blocks in intercultural understanding. People often do things in different cultures that **APPEAR** to be the same but often it is only the form that is the same, but function is different. Look and listen and think about the "why" but be careful not to generalise, you are staying with one Belgian family out of many.*

**** APPRECIATION***

*Your family accepts you out of kindness, they receive no material advantage from it. **SHOW** them that you are grateful - not by buying expensive gifts - but by frequent thank you's, by lending a helping hand, by showing **ENTHUSIASM** and **INTEREST** in what they have to offer. Appreciation is necessary in building lasting bonds between your family and you.*

**** OPENNESS***

*You are in Belgium to **LEARN, LISTEN, and OBSERVE**. Take in all impressions and information you can. Do not hesitate to ask for advice from your family, from friends, from AFS and don't be afraid to be corrected. There is so much to learn and you don't lose face if you ask questions. Ask your family to give you their honest opinion, show them if you feel uneasy about something, **TALK** to your family about it. They may not realise unless you share your feelings. Openness on the part of everyone involved is how everyone learns.*

**** CONSIDERATION***

*Consideration is important in everyday matters such as not keeping others in your family waiting while you are daydreaming in the bathroom and saving your mother extra work by keeping your own room clean. Offer to help. Be sensitive to others. **If you are invited somewhere and your host brother or -sister is not, ask if they can come along**. If someone has something he wants to say, take time and listen. Close relationships grow with sensitivity and consideration.*

**** HUMOR***

A laugh, a smile - they are international means of communication. This includes laughing at yourself. Being able to laugh at your own shortcomings and mistakes is a characteristic of a balanced person. A good laugh will give you the strength to correct a mistake! We take our aims very seriously and we think that you have a very important task as an AFSer but you will be more successful if you do not take yourself too seriously.

• IN SHORT

When you think about these attitudes you will realise that they not only apply to Belgium and AFS but that they are very important everywhere people LIKE people and try to overcome personal barriers, whether in a family, a community or in another culture. These attitudes will always help you reach your fellow man.

YOUR FAMILY

*By the time you arrive in your host family you will know something, if only little, about them. You will have read their application, but most people find it hard to put anything about themselves down on paper (who doesn't?). If your placement has been made early enough you will have exchanged some letters or e-mails with the family. Sometimes the impression you may have gathered about your host family and community may prove to be different from reality. If so, stay open, look around you and find out what you could learn from it and what you could give. **The first important step you will have to take is that of becoming a member of your new family.***

*On your application, AFS asked you many questions regarding your placement preferences, your hobbies, sport activities, and musical interests. We used this information – along with your family background and the comments made by your interviewer – to match you with the most compatible family for you from those who volunteered and were qualified to host. **Please understand that it may not have been possible for AFS BFR to meet every preference you stated.** The most important part of being an exchange student is not where you live, but the experience that you will have with you Belgian family and school.*

Your host family will probably be very different from your normal family. You must immediately put aside your expectations and stereotypes. In your host family, there might be teenagers, or there could be young children. It's possible that your family won't have any children, or perhaps you will be placed with a single-parent family. Just as there is no such thing as a typical exchange student, there is also no such thing as a typical host family. Our families come from a variety of economic backgrounds and live in many different environments. We expect that you will have the maturity and optimistic curiosity needed to welcome the new experiences and opportunities your placement offers.

It is possible that during the first days, even though we have asked your family to treat you like their other children, nothing will be demanded of you, and that you will be considered more like a guest. In such case it is up to you to take action by offering your COOPERATION, after having carefully assessed when your help is most likely to be accepted. We shall ask your family, however, to tell you about special "house rules" which they may want you to follow, such as night-hours, making your own bed, helping with the dishes, etc. We think you will appreciate knowing this from the beginning rather than finding out later.

***But whatever the question might be, do not hesitate to ask your family.** You will find that it requires a great deal of maturity, insight and tact to be a true brother or sister to a complete stranger. Be patient, if they sometimes do not seem able to live up to it, and above all, help them to fulfil their task by trying yourself to act in a truly brotherly or sisterly manner.*

Should misunderstandings arise, try to resolve them at once by talking about them, be ready to make fun of your own mistakes and to forgive a thoughtless action of others.

*Do not impose wishes on your family and don't expect anything. **You have not come to Belgium as a tourist. Sightseeing is not the purpose of your stay in our country.** So if your family takes you on trips, be grateful for it. If they don't, don't be disappointed but show interest. They will be proud of showing you some of the cultural, unique and beautiful places in their community. If not, you will have opportunities to come*

back in the future as a tourist. But the opportunity to live the everyday life of a Belgian family for a year will not likely be yours again.

FAMILY LIFE IS VERY IMPORTANT. *Family members share almost every meal together; teenagers are used to refer to parents all the time; parents have a lot to say. Parental authority is essential in education. As long as children live at home, they depend on their parents and must follow the rules of the house.*

In addressing your Belgian parents find out right away what to call them, either by their first name or as "papa" and "maman" or a nickname.

EVERYDAY LIFE

*** COMMUNITY**

Broadly speaking, contact with neighbours is not as close as it might be imagined, even in the smaller villages. The family's immediate members and relatives will usually be close to each other. As for your status in the community, it is possible that apart from your family and their friends few people will know about you or be acquainted with AFS. Actually people will be glad to know you, but THE FIRST STEPS TOWARD ESTABLISHING CONTACTS MUST OFTEN BE MADE BY YOU.

*** SOCIAL LIFE**

*Your social life will probably differ from what you are used to. As another broad generalisation, it will centre on the family or your brother's and sister's small group of friends. Do not expect to be on the go all the time. Of course, social life will vary greatly according to your family, but **be sure to ask if you want to go out and to tell your parents when, where, with whom and how long.** Also, talk to your brothers and sisters about habits of your family.*

*** EXTRA CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES**

Although the school curriculum is very heavy in Belgian schools, there is still time to go in for sports or art or for joining youth clubs.

Sports: *Most schools have a gym and sports ground where students can practice (mostly during the classes) gym or athletics, play basketball, volleyball or netball. Moreover there are many public swimming pools, sports centres, football clubs and riding schools are available at moderate prices.*

Arts: *Music, drama, singing, drawing, painting and sculpture-making are taught in special schools called Académies. Classes take place after school (late afternoon) or in the evening.*

Many churches have choirs and usually welcome anyone interested in singing.

Anyway if you play an instrument which can easily be packed in your luggage (flute, recorder, clarinet, etc.) do bring it along.

Youth clubs: *Many young Belgians belong to youth clubs (boy scouts, girl guides, etc.). You should also be able to join such groups.*

Do not hesitate to tell your host family, as soon as you get here, if you wish to join any extra-curricular activity. Classes at the Académies start at the beginning of September and there are always more applications than places available.

But remember: **AFS does not pay for any extra-curricular activity.**

*** DRINKING**

It is customary sometimes to drink wine or beer with food in Belgium. You may also be offered alcoholic beverages, and you may accept it if it is in accordance with your host family and yourself. But never forget that the abuse of alcohol is forbidden during your stay and you could be sent home if you don't respect this rule. Alcohol is forbidden during all AFS activities.

The national office and the local chapters has become very strict on alcohol use and no excess will be allowed. As Belgium is a small country, it is easy for participants to meet together and have some drinks in a pub. For your own safety and for the image of AFS you give, abusing alcohol will be severely punished.

• DRUGS

Drugs are not widely spread in Belgium and their trade or use is severely punished. Your stay in Belgium implies that you respect the local legislation. Furthermore this is also an AFS international rule that you can't use drugs during your experience.

• FOOD

Eating our food is part of the experience. Many AFSers gain weight. Don't offend your family by refusing to eat what they have to offer just because of your figure. If there is something that you really dislike, you may of course say no, but do make a sincere effort to taste everything.

Don't take more on your plate than you can eat. It is much better to take enough the first time and then to ask for some more - something which delights parents!

• MANNERS

When greeting a friend or relative, it is common that a kiss on the cheek (girls and boys alike) accompanies this greeting. You shake hands when you are introduced to people older than you and to authorities. Life in your host family will probably not be as informal and casual as you may expect. When you leave the house or when you go to bed (for instance), say goodbye to each person; do not sit on furniture that is not made to be sat upon, don't put your feet on furniture or slam doors. Look and observe!!

• TABLE MANNERS

Table manners are a special field and will give you a practical demonstration. Watch your family closely and if there are uncertainties, ASK!! Usually you do not start the meal before the mother or father does, nor do you get up before everyone is finished.

We take our time to eat.

• MEDICAL

Belgium has an excellent health service. If you feel ill, turn to your family and see a doctor immediately. AFS will pay for medical treatment.

• MONEY

The allowance that you bring with you is in most cases more than your brothers and sisters will have. Therefore do not spend your money too easily and do consult your family on what to purchase or whether something is economical.

Don't buy large and expensive souvenirs. Keep in mind that your family offers their hospitality without charge and playing the "rich tourist" would indeed show poor taste.

However, do not sit on your money either. Buy your own admission and extra bus tickets. If once in a while you treat your brother or sister or bring your mother flowers, they will be very happy. Watch out for some of the small things... be considerate.

Coins

1 Cent (copper-colored)

Notes

5 Euros (grey)

2 Cents (copper-colored)
5 Cents (copper-colored)
10 Cents (golden)
20 Cents (golden)
50 Cents (golden)
1 Euro (golden + silver in the middle)
2 Euros (silver + golden in the middle)

10 Euros (red)
20 Euros (blue)
50 Euros (orange)
100 Euros (green)
200 Euros (yellow)
500 Euros (violet)

The Euro currency is valid in the following countries: Belgium, Germany, Greece, Spain, France, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, Austria, Portugal et Finland. The coins and notes have a common side in all countries and a national side for each of them. All of them are valid in the countries of the Euro zone.

**We inform you that compulsory school costs are reimbursed for a maximum of 200€.
School transportation costs will be reimbursed only on a monthly/year pass base.
Proof is required before reimbursement of any costs.**

**** SPENDING MONEY AND EXTRA FUNDS***

You should count on about 150 - 200 Euros a month to cover personal expenses such as postage, phone, personal toilet articles, presents, movies, theatre, school supplies (except books). The cost of living is high. Clothes, phone, postage are very expensive.

How much does it cost approximately?

movies: 8 Euros

theatre: 13 Euros (price for students only)

a drink in a café (soda): 1.6 to 3.5 Euros

a concert ticket: min. 30 Euros

a bus ticket: about 2.5 Euro

a sandwich: about 3.5 Euros

Discount may be given if you are holder of a student card, which you should get from your school.

**** TRANSPORT***

The public transport system in Belgium is quite well developed. There's a good bus and train network.

It is good to know there is a special train card for young people under 26, it's called "GO PASS". It costs about 51 Euros for 10 one-way (or 5 return) journeys anywhere in Belgium (except the border' stations and the national airport).

There are also different options for the bus, but it depends on the area you'll be living in. You should ask your host family upon your arrival.

**** TELEPHONE***

In Belgium all phone calls must be paid, even the local ones. So don't spend hours on the phone, your host family might not appreciate it.

**** ELECTRICITY and VIDEO SYSTEM***

In Belgium the voltage is 220 V. If you want to bring any electrical appliance (hairdryer, shaver,...) made for 110 V, don't forget to bring the transformer. You might also need a plug adaptator.

About TV, Belgium uses the PAL system with 60 Hz, which is different from the system used in other continents.

**** INTERNET***

Most of Belgian families have an access to Internet but the way they use it may vary. In some families, WiFi is available and each member of the family has their own computer in their room. In other families, there is a computer

shared between all members in the living room. Anyway, in each case, you will respect and follow family rules regarding Internet use.

• COST OF LIVING

In general, Belgian families are concerned about their energy-consuming. Gas, fuel, electricity and water are quiet expensive. We ask you to watch your own consumption, for example: do not forget to switch off the lights when you leave a room, switch off the heating when it is not necessary, close the window when the heating is on... Your host family will be grateful if you pay attention to this. We must remind you that the people who have offered to share their home with you do not receive any money for inviting you into their home.

• RELIGION

Belgium has mainly a tradition of Roman Catholic religion. However, not everyone practices their faith and will not necessarily go to church every Sunday. If your family is religious and you want to accompany them to church, go ahead, but of course you have no obligation. If they are not religious they will not mind you attending church while they stay at home, unless they have planned something special. Ask, be open, and talk about this with your family. You may of course attend services of your own faith. Just keep in mind that your religion might not be widespread in Belgium and that there might not be a place of worship close to you, and that your host family is likely to expect you to be able to go there by your own.

• SOME USEFULL WEBSITES

To have a look at the public transportations:

www.stib.be (In Brussels and its surrounding)

www.infotec.be

www.b-rail.be (Belgian train company)

To have touristic and cultural information:

<http://www.opt.be/>

In trying to give you a glimpse, we have made some very large generalisations on life in Belgium. PLEASE realise that every family is different. All your families have one thing in common though: they are ready to welcome you with open arms and they are looking forward to having you with them. They will help you and try to understand you but do not ask them to adapt to you. Make it your task to come out of yourself.

Observe, ask questions and try their way of life...

AFS RULES

INTERNATIONAL RULES

- * AFSers must not drive a car or other motor vehicles during their stay*
- * AFSers must not hitchhike*
- * No drugs*
- * No abuse of alcohol*
- * No alcohol during national orientation (Belgian rule)*
- * No travel without AFS authorisation*

Any student violating one of these rules will be sent home immediately.

In Belgium we are very severe concerning travelling rules (see rules below), drugs and alcohol: if you don't respect them you can be sent home.

BELGIAN RULES

**** JOBS***

AFSers may not accept or look for any paid job. The purpose of the stay is not to earn money but to learn to know the country. A little job as for instance baby-sitting is allowed but the insurance will not cover you if you cause any damage during babysitting.

**** SCHOOL***

Enrolled in a school-based program, all AFS students have to attend school full time, to do school works and show progress, to behave cooperatively in school according to the disciplinary system of the respective high school, to participate in exams. After the exams (December, March and June), students have to send a copy of his/her transcripts to our office. A student's irresponsible behaviour towards school can threaten the future relationships with AFS. In case a student does not attend school regularly, AFS can decide to send the student home.

**** ORIENTATIONS***

The attendance at AFS orientations activities is compulsory.

**** TRAVELLING***

General: *AFSers may travel outside their host country under definite conditions:*

- Trips with host family or school: AFS office must be informed but no authorization needed.*
 - All other trips must be approved by us and by your actual parents and you need AFS authorization before making any reservation.*
- In all cases we need an address where to reach you. A trip without an adult member of the host family is considered as an independent travel.*
- No travelling is allowed during schooldays*
 - Any travel plan must be sent to the AFS office at least 15 days before the planned trip.*

Travelling without your host family or school

- NOT allowed before the 1st of January.*
- Allowed only for a total of 20 days for the whole stay in Belgium.*
- Allowed only in European countries*

- **For every trip**, you must fill out a travel form including the approval of your host family. Besides, in case of independent trip (without your host family or without the school) the AFS office in your country will contact your actual parents in order to sign a **'program waiver for independent travel'** that will be sent to our office.
- Any travel has to be asked at least 15 days before the date chosen.
- You will have to wait our office approval before making the appropriate reservations.
- The AFS office can at any time refuse the permission for a trip: if school expectations are not met, for example.

Visits: Visits of relatives or friends in the host country may severely disturb your adaptation process, that's why **they are strongly discouraged and forbidden before 1st of January**. You should always talk with us about them beforehand. In any case, travelling with your natural family will count as an independent travel.

Program release/extended stay: Under specific conditions a program release will be possible. If you want to extend your stay, please contact the AFS BFR Office.

IF...

YOU GO ON A TRIP

For more than one day, let us know your address so that we can reach you at any time.

YOU BECOME SICK

Consult your family, see a doctor and inform AFS immediately. It's important to make the doctor fill in the medical formulary your host parents will receive at your arrival.

In case of serious illness or accident we should be made aware immediately by phone (02/743.85.40) or fax (02/743.85.50).

We will then inform AFS in your home country and they will contact your natural parents. After recovery, a medical report and the bills should be sent to us.

YOU GET HOMESICK

*When you are homesick get up and do something or talk with someone in your family. Homesickness comes from missing people or things that are familiar. **MAKE YOURSELF FAMILIAR** with your new surroundings!*

YOU FEEL UNHAPPY

*If for some reason you feel uncomfortable talk to your family. They are there to help you. They want you to be happy. Many minor difficulties can be solved with **OPENNESS** and **TACT**. If you do not think that your family can help you, please let your counsellor know immediately. There is no use wasting valuable time by pondering your fate and being unhappy. We are here to advise and help you.*

AN EMERGENCY ARISES

*Are you stranded? Have you lost your passport? - Anything major: let us know about it immediately. Call us! Our phone number is: **02/743.85.40** during the business hours. The emergency number – **for real emergencies only** (mobile phone with a voice mail) - where you can reach the duty officer after hours is **0475/ 45.38.90**.*

AFS BELGIUM AND YOU

THE ORGANISATION

AFS Programmes interculturels asbl** was founded by French-speaking Belgian returnees. This organisation runs the AFS program in French-speaking Belgium (Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles***); its members are former AFSers, their parents, former host families and people who are interested in the ideals of AFS.*

At the local level, AFS chapters consist of volunteers who devote a lot of their spare time to AFS (they are the ones who find and interview host families among other things).

One member of the local committee will be your counsellor: he or she will be personally responsible for keeping in touch with you. Of course, if you have a problem or if there is anything you want to talk about, please be proactive and don't hesitate to personally contact your counsellor.

THE LOCAL CHAPTERS

Volunteers are brought together in 7 chapters. Besides the monthly contact you'll have with your counsellor, feel free to get in contact with your local chapter by using these email addresses:

<i>Comité du Brabant</i>	<i><u>brabant.afs@gmail.com</u></i>
<i>Comité de Bruxelles</i>	<i><u>afsbruxelles@gmail.com</u></i>
<i>Comité du Hainaut Occidental</i>	<i><u>afshainaut.occidental@gmail.com</u></i>
<i>Comité du Hainaut Oriental</i>	
<i>Comité de Liège</i>	<i><u>comiteafsliege@gmail.com</u></i>
<i>Comité du Luxembourg</i>	<i><u>comiteafsluxembourg@gmail.com</u></i>
<i>Comité de Namur</i>	<i><u>afsnamur@gmail.com</u></i>

AFS ACTIVITIES

There will be some local gatherings and three large mandatory get-together for all of you during the year (the post-arrival orientation in September; the mid-stay in January, the end-of-stay in June before departure).

*Between January and March, there is the global education activity which is called the “**projet solid'air**” (i.e. **Social Week**) where all students will work in a social organisation over one week or during three weekends. This activity is organised to show you another face of your host country.*

THE OFFICE

Volunteers and local chapters are supported by a staff of 10 employees.

We are at your disposal if you need help, so please be open and honest. Tell us the good things that happen, but let us know if there are problems too. We have lots of experience and can make suggestions that might not come to you straight away and we can recommend sources of help unknown to you. We can also help others see things from a different perspective and perhaps understand you better. Nothing makes us sadder than to discover at the end of the year that some student has been unhappy or struggling with a difficult problem all year and never let us know.

We hope you will trust us, and we will respect you and be honest with you, too. We will not show your correspondence to anyone outside the AFS office. You can always turn to us if you need help. And always remember:

We are glad to have you here...You can reach us by phone from Monday to Friday from 9.30 AM till 5.30 PM. If you want to meet a staff member, please make an appointment by phone.

GOING TO SCHOOL

While in Belgium, most of you will attend the last or second to last year of high school.

*Don't be disappointed if you do not receive an overwhelming welcome on your first day of school. It is quite possible that hardly anyone will know about you or know what AFS in general stands for. **Finding your place in the class community and making friends will depend largely on your willingness to plough ahead despite any obstacle.***

Before school starts or on your first day of school you should meet with the principal to introduce yourself and talk about your class schedule. You will be a regular student like all the other students of the school for whom it is compulsory to attend all classes. Please keep in mind that you will be like an ambassador for the AFS programs. To ensure the continued good cooperation between schools and AFS intercultural programs, we rely on you to behave like a truly involved and dedicated student.

<i>Moreover, we ask you to prepare a presentation about your country, your culture and your AFS experience as an exchange student. We will ask you to give this presentation at school for your classmates and teachers. We think it will be a good way for you to integrate with your school and a good start to socialize with people around you.</i>

When deciding about your schedule, you may want to try out several courses for a few weeks in order to see how advanced they are before making your final decision.

*A normal school day starts at **8 AM and ends at 4 PM**. There is a break of about 1 hour at noon and two other 15 minutes breaks during the day. Wednesday afternoon is free and there is no school on Saturday.*

***Schoolyear and vacation:** school starts shortly around September 1st. With regards to vacations, there is one week around November 1st, two at Christmas (Winter break), one around carnival, two at Easter (Spring break) and the summer vacation starting on July 1st.*

SCHOOLS

In the south part of Belgium where you'll be hosted, all classes are given in French.

There are two basic types of educational institutions : the schools run by the regional, provincial or local authorities and the independent or "free" schools directed by private individuals or by non-profit organisations, usually religious and, for the most part, catholic. These "free" schools are usually popular and have a good reputation. The law sets standards for all schools, but allows more flexibility to set curricula in the "free" or independent sector than in the public one.

*The vast majority of the schools are **mixed**. Just a few free schools remain non-coed, with boys and girls studying in separate schools and a few-all girls catholic schools require the wearing of school uniforms, in which case jewellery and make-up are most often equally forbidden at school.*

THE SCHOOL SYSTEM

Primary system: 6 years starting at the age of 6.

Secondary system: 6 years before final graduation

- The first two years ("*observation*") are common to all.
- The next two years ("*orientation*"), special options start with human sciences, Latin, maths, sciences, art or economics as main subjects.
- The last two years ("*determination*") are even more "*à la carte*" and you can e.g. choose between maths 7 (hours/week) or 5 or 3.

There are exams three times a year and promotion to the following grade is subject to approval by the teachers' council. The usual rule is 60% average and 50% in all major subjects, a number of schools allowing/imposing a special examination just before the beginning of the following year if failure is not too important. Because of the rather strict rules, a majority of Belgian students have had to repeat at least one year.

School education (compulsory until the age of 18) tends to be rather intellectual (based on the acquisition of knowledge) and quite demanding. It is not unusual for teenagers to study 2 or 3 hours in the evening and sometimes during the weekend. This means also that little time is left for emotional-creative education, most of the teenagers doing these kinds of things out of school. Sport activities are sometimes linked to school but then they are mainly team sports competition and only take place during free time (Wednesday afternoons and weekends).

Your host family will choose your host school according to the possibilities in your area and according to where you host brothers/sisters go to school.

AFS students usually attend what we call "general secondary schools". These are the **academic** secondary schools where the learning is mostly theoretical. However it is also possible to attend "vocational schools" if you wish. There you'll have academic classes as well like French and History but you'll have the possibility to choose between different practical options (e.g. mechanics, childcare, manufacture, agriculture...) At the end of the school year, you'll receive a full grade report in all subjects in which you've participated.

LANGUAGES

Belgians tend to be quite good at languages, being at the cross-roads of the Latin and the Germanic cultures (study of Dutch, our second language, is compulsory for at least 6 years) and at the heart of the European Community. English training is optional, yet followed by 90% of the students. Spanish and/or German are also taught in some schools.

AFS SCHOOL REPORT

An important part of your stay in Belgium is your dedication to your schoolwork. AFS, your host family and your school expect you to behave just as if you were a normal Belgian student. It will help your integration and makes sense for your AFS year. However, we all know you are not a normal Belgian student. This is why we ask your school to evaluate your progress through a special AFS school report.

SCHOOL TRIP

If your class is going on any school trip - be this a week skiing, or a longer stay somewhere else - you may of course participate. **The cost for this will however have to be covered by your own funds.** In any such case do not forget to inform us in advance, giving details about the trip and also the exact address.

BELGIUM IN EUROPE

LOCATION

Belgium is one of the smallest countries in Europe. It has an area of 30.513 km² (11.779 square miles). Its population reaches nearly 10 million people (an average of 323 inhabitants/km²): 72 % of the population live in the cities, 28 % are rural.

Belgium is located on the west coast of continental Europe, along the North Sea, between the Netherlands to the north, Germany and the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg to the east, France to the south, and faces the south-east coast of England. Its position at the junction of Latin and Germanic cultures explains why part of the population speak French, others speak Flemish (close to Dutch) and a small group speak German.

Belgium has only been independent since 1830 when a revolution led to the secession from the Netherlands. For centuries it had been part of many foreign states (Spain, Austria, France). Its current border, which is very long (1.495 km or 870 miles) and winding, was laid down mainly by international treaties.

Its cross roads position in Western Europe has given the country a long tradition in international trade. Low altitudes, inland waterways and roads have for centuries enabled merchants and goods to travel easily and reach the North Sea harbours. Today, our close-knit and well lit road network is visible at night from satellites and space shuttles! Unfortunately this central position has also brought the country the surname of "battlefield of Europe" (remember Waterloo, WW I and WW II to name only a few).

Nowadays, thanks to the central location of the country, Brussels, its capital city, has become headquarters of two major international organisations: the European Union (E.U.) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (N.A.T.O.). This in turn has brought many international organisations and private companies to establish offices in the country.

GEOGRAPHY

Although the altitudes only range from sea level to about 700 meters, Belgian landscapes are very diverse and may be classified into 3 main regions.

- In the low region you will find sandy beaches and a few hills that rise to 150 meters.*
- The central region is covered by plateau. The altitudes rises between 100 and 200 meters.*
- The high region is characterised by its picturesque landscapes, its forests and its deep narrow valleys.*

WATERWAYS

Three rivers basins drain most of the Belgian territory: the Yser, the Schelde in the low region and the Meuse in the central and high region.

CLIMATE

Belgium enjoys an oceanic temperate climate: mostly mild winters, warm summers, with regular but moderate rainfall. Yet as the weather is also influenced by cold air from the north or hot air from the south, harsh cold spells in the winter or hot spells in the summer are not unusual. The yearly average temperatures range from 10° Celsius along the shore to 7,5° Celsius on the high grounds.

ECONOMY

In the field of agriculture, crops vary with soil and altitude. The northern region is well-known for growing vegetables and flowers. Wheat and sugar beet grow in the central region with orchards at its northern edge. South of the Meuse valley is mostly cattle raising country and woodlands.

Beside agricultural raw materials, Belgium has few natural resources: brick-making clay in Flanders, sand in the central region, limestone, sandstone, shale in the south: no oil, no ore, no more coal. Fortunately, its location along the North Sea, its very elaborate network of roads, navigable rivers and canals has allowed raw materials to be imported and reach industrial sites spread over the northern and central areas as far south as the Meuse Valley. A centuries long tradition of fine craftsmanship has led to expertise and turned the country into a centre for hi-tech modern industry.

Trade, services, Civil Service and tourism also offer many jobs.

The different sectors hold: - agriculture: 2,6% of the active population

- Industry: 28,4%

- Services: 69%

GOVERNMENT

Although people have been living on this land since at least 800,000 B.C., Belgium only became a nation state in 1830. In fact, Belgium has been led by many other nations: the Roman Empire, Spain, Austria, France or Holland.

These foreign "occupations" have left distinctive marks on Belgium's historical and cultural heritage and have contributed to the open-mindedness of the people.

Since 1830, Belgium has been a constitutional monarchy. The present head of the state is King Philippe (his wife is Queen Mathilde). Originally, Belgium was a very centralised country but since 1970, some changes in policies have led to a federal democracy.

The particularity of Belgium's federal system is that there is a cohabitation of 3 Regions and 3 Communities, which don't correspond geographically. The Regions are based on a territorial notion: Brussels, Wallonia and Flanders. The Communities are based on the language spoken, they are a group of people: the French-language Community, the Dutch-language Community and the German-language Community. Belgium is also divided into 10 provinces.

*You will stay in the French-speaking part called the **Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles**, i.e. Brussels and the southern part of the country.*

The federal government retains main responsibility for foreign affairs, defence, justice, communications and social security.

The federation Wallonie-Bruxelles is responsible for education, research, cultural affairs (radio, TV, etc.), sports and tourism. It is very active internationally in promoting the French language.

*The French-speaking Belgian citizens elect their representatives to the federal assemblies (Senate and House of Representatives) and to the assembly of the **Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles** every four years (the full legal age is 18).*

*The local governments (*communes*) are elected every 6 years.*

Our legal institutions will seem very complex to you, but they reflect the Belgian genius for compromise which has helped the Belgian spirit to survive despite the numerous foreign occupations of the country.

You can visit the official web site of the Belgium for further information:

<http://www.belgium.fgov.be>

SAFETY TIPS

Personal safety concerns

Dear student,

You may think that a booklet giving you some advice about your safety is not a very fun 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 Belgium and allow you to make the most of it. We still believe that Belgium is a rather safe country but people do not deal with the issue of personal safety the same way worldwide. These questions are specific to individual countries or even parts of a single country. So it is important you read the following tips very carefully.

A primary objective of experiential learning programs such as those offered by AFS is to help the participant learn through observation, question, dialogue, discussion and experience. This is also true in the field of safety. But from experience AFS staff and volunteers understand that the opportunity to learn is great, but it is not necessarily easy. Participants encounter complex situations along the way and there is potential for confusion, fear and misunderstanding. If students were left to their own devices, the consequences could be very distressing. For these reasons with the help of host families, local community AFS contacts and school personnel, AFS has devised the system of "program support" for all participants providing a wide range of supportive activities and services. The purpose is to provide a "safety net" . . . a consistently supportive environment in which participants can ask questions, and obtain advice and help.

AFS cannot give you all the answers, but through our support systems, we can help to guide participants towards appropriate questions. In reading this guide, there are some questions we encourage you to ask to your host family, AFS local committee members or staff from the host school.

Of course, we can not anticipate all possible situations pertaining to individual safety concerns. AFS recommends that students always talk about any questions they may have about specific personal issues. This dialogue and your trust in rules and advice given by the AFS staff, volunteers or by your host family will surely be your best safeguards.

In or around the home

Safety concerns do not only vary from one country to another but also from one region from another and more importantly from one family to another.

Here are just some general customs of Belgian families, but we insist that you speak with your own host family about their way to deal with safety.

In Belgium, people usually lock their doors and windows when they leave, except in some small and rural villages where everybody knows each other. In cities, most people also lock their front door when they are home. In case you lost your keys, families will very likely replace all the locks. You must be aware that this would be on your charge.

You will very likely receive a house key: it goes without saying that you have to be very careful not to lose it. In any case, don't have this key along with an ID card or any document stating your address in Belgium.

AFS suggest that you don't keep large amount of money at home. To avoid this, you may ask your host family to take care of it. In Belgium, it is very easy for young people to have a bank account and it may be the best way to secure your pocket money.

Here are some important points you should discuss with your host family:

- Do you keep the doors of the house locked at all times? If not, when should the doors be locked?*
- What should I do if I'm alone and a stranger is at the door? Is it safe to open the door? What should I tell him?*
- Will I have my own house key?*
- In case of a problem while I'm home alone, or in case I've lost my key, who should I ask for help? Neighbors? Which ones?*
- Where are emergency phone numbers listed?*
- Does the family have first aid equipment and a fire extinguisher? Where are they?*
- How should I answer the phone? What information should I not give out to strangers?*
- Are there any appliances (gas stove for example that are very common in Belgium) that might cause problems and I should be aware of?*

Outside the home

AFS encourages you to let your host parents know whenever you are concerned or frightened. Your host family knows the most about their community and is best prepared to give you advice about places it would be better for you to avoid and how best to get around. In general, you should take their advice seriously and follow their recommendations. Ask them what they recommend to help you feel more personally secure.

When you are going out, AFS asks you let someone at home know where you are going and, if possible, a telephone number of where you will be. For practically all families in Belgium, to know where you are going, what time you expect to come back and to be advised if, for any reason, you can not come back at the expected time are basic expectations.

Pick-pockets and robberies are not very widespread but, mainly in cities or crowded areas, you should be cautious. In general, you should not carry along large amount of money or very valuable things. If you have opened a bank account, you will find very easily in cities cash machines to withdraw money from. When going to parties, you should keep a watchful eye on your belongings, as there are unfortunately risks of robbery.

In some cases you may want to visit some other country abroad with your host family or school during your stay in Belgium. In such cases you would first have to check at the embassy to see if you are going to need a visa to enter that country. We would like to draw your attention to the fact that having a visa to enter Belgium does not imply that you can enter other European countries without needing another visa (even if Belgians are not required to have a visa to visit that country). You should be aware of the consequences that might follow if you

do not adhere to the legal requirements when traveling to other countries: these could range from paying a fine to getting withheld by the country's authorities.

Important points to discuss with your host family:

- *Are there unsafe neighborhoods or places in the area? During daytime? After dark?*
- *Is there certain public transportation I should avoid taking late at night?*
- *What kind of identification should I carry with me?*
- *What should I do if approached by someone I don't know? How should I reply?*

At school

Generally speaking, schools in Belgium are very safe but like in many countries, drugs sometimes circulate in high schools. Whenever you feel uncomfortable, there are always people ready to help in your school. It might be your main teacher, called "titulaire", a teacher you feel comfortable with, or the director of the school.

Most of the time, students do not have a personal locker at school. You should not then bring valuable things to school (neither in sport clubs or public places).

Illegal drugs, alcohol abuse

Illegal drugs and substance

All participants are forbidden to use illegal drugs and substances. In Belgium, use or possession of drugs are strongly punishable by law. **Explicit violation of this rule is cause for dismissal from the program and immediate return to the home country.** It is most important that you remember this should you find yourself in a situation where illegal substances are being used.

Alcohol

Drinking age in Belgium is 16 for beers and wine and 18 for spirits. Belgium is well known for its various beers. It is very common for young people to have a drink in a café. Exchange students should be very cautious with this: Belgian beers are much stronger than regular beers. You should avoid being drunk because this could lead to uncomfortable and dangerous situations, some people might take advantage of it. Being drunk in public places is still punishable by law and host parents as well as most teenagers do not approve of people getting drunk.

Having a drink together for people less than 18 in Belgium is socially acceptable. However, many young people do not drink, and you never have to feel obliged to drink alcoholic beverages, even if someone insists you do and pretends to take it badly if you don't. AFS expect you to have a responsible attitude towards alcohol. **Abuse of alcoholic beverages could be cause for early return.**

If you're invited to go to a party or a special event and are not sure if it is safe to go, AFS recommends that you find out a little about the party or event, where is it being held and who will be there. Usually your host siblings, parents, friends or teachers at school can give information about the event and the people expected to attend. Your host parents may also forbid you to attend certain kinds of parties or events. You should respect the parents advice, even if others you know are going.

If you find yourself in a place where you're not comfortable, because drugs are being used or because you are not at ease with the people, you should never be ashamed to leave. If you don't want to hurt people's feelings, you might say you have to go because you're tired or not feeling well.

When going out, you should always think about how you are coming back: you should know the public transportation's timetable as they stop running at night. If you intend to come back by car with a friend, make sure he is not drunk and is capable to drive. We strongly advise you to not accept a ride from someone you don't know well. We also want to remind you that hitch-hiking is strictly forbidden for AFS students.

In Belgium, many cities have special celebrations and festivals which last several days and bring about large crowd gatherings. These celebrations are mainly about fun and joy but like in any crowd gathering, especially when there is a lot of drinking going on, some people can't refrain from excesses. We don't wish to prevent you from attending to such celebrations but we strongly suggest that you do not go alone or only with other exchange students and that you be very careful regarding safety, drinking,...

Sexuality

During your AFS experience, you'll have many new and different experiences. Yet there are things that 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.*

Cultures differ in their views of appropriate sexual behavior and practice for young people. Often clarification of attitudes may be necessary and here, again, the advice of people you have come to know and trust is very valuable. Knowledge about the people you socialize with is important, and this is acquired best through increasing knowledge of the culture. Equally important are your own values and beliefs regarding your behavior. In societies where some young people are sexually active, there are also many who are not. You should not compromise your own personal values and beliefs regarding sexual behavior.

*If you decide to have sexual intercourse, **always use protection**. Condoms are widely available in pharmacies and supermarkets. Other contraceptives are also widely available and fairly easily obtainable (please note that you will need a doctor's prescription to buy birth control pil).*

In Belgium, boys and girls may go out together without meaning that they are together or boy/girl friends. There is no chaperoning for young people. This doesn't mean that everything is socially acceptable or meaningless. You will have to learn these "rules" and "practices" by observing people and by asking friend, family siblings questions.

Sexual harassment

You may be unsure in some situations if you are being sexually harassed or if a particular person's behavior would be considered normally friendly. An important resource is your own instinct. Also, often your host siblings/parents and friends will be able to advise you about normal behavior of people you do not know. Other resources to whom you can turn for advice or help are teachers at school, and the AFS contacts within your community or at the National Office.

Sexual harassment and rape are likely to happen in any country. Women especially are subject to harassment and rape risks. We would like to draw their attention to the following advises:

- AFS girls should not go to unknown places (parties, bars, events) alone or with people they don't know very well. All AFSers should take care of each other.*
- They should avoid isolated places and never accept a ride from someone they don't know well.*
- In a crowded place, if feeling harassed by someone, they should move away, try to make contact with other people or loudly yell to intimidate the person and catch attention.*
- Upon realising that they are followed, they should try to go into a public place (shop, restaurant,...), or even knock the door of a near house and ask for help.*

LGBTQ

Belgian society is in general rather accepting towards the LGBTQ (Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Queer/Questioning) community. Belgium was the second country in the world to legalise same-sex marriage (2003) and one of the first to legalise same-sex adoption (2006).

AFS Belgium French is active against any kind of discrimination and that's why there is a hotline for participants and host families. Anyone who has questions, concerns or who doesn't feel respected in its sexual orientation can reach out the email address: lgbtq@afs.org

Public display of affection (kissing, holding hands ...) are allowed and generally acceptable for heterosexual and same-sex couples alike, although just as with any other matter, some people will be more accepting than others.

EMERGENCIES

The role of police authorities vary from country to country. Each country is different.

In most countries adolescent boys are more likely than girls to find themselves being questioned by the police or other civil authority officer. AFS advises you to show respect and cooperate with authorities, even though you may be innocent of any crime and think you are being treated unfairly.

In such a situation, it is unlikely that you will understand what is being said by the authority figure. In general, the best advice would be to say that you do not understand what is happening and identify yourself as an exchange student. Besides, you must always carry in Belgium your foreigner identification card (CIRE = Carte d'Identité de Résident Etranger). This is important not only in the event of being questioned by authorities, but also in the unfortunate event of a personal accident or if you become the victim of a crime and may not be able to effectively communicate.

There are also some emergency no-charge services you should keep in mind:



Emergency numbers in Belgium:

- 100** *emergency medical help (Belgium only)*
- 100** *firemen (Belgium only)*
- 101** *police (Belgium only)*
- 112** *emergency number in Belgium and all EU countries*

In case of security issues or terrorist alert

Belgium is generally speaking a very safe country. However recently there is an elevated threat of terrorist attack by ISIS militants. We ask hosted students to follow the instructions of police and authorities. AFS may change the policy for independent travel for your security based on the advice of authorities.

In case of a terrorist attack it is wise to inform your host family that you are safe. Always carry their contact information with you. You can contact AFS 24 hours, 7/7 on the emergency phone. Carry the number with you at all times (0475/ 453.890).

AFS Belgium-French monitors the safety of all of you constantly. We contact the organization AFS of your home country to let them know about your situation. If they are worrying, your parents can always contact AFS office in your home country and they will be in touch with our office.

Insurance

We very strongly recommend you and your parents to take out a third party liability insurance that covers you during your stay in Belgium. This kind of insurance covers damage you might incur to your host family's property, for example if you accidentally break an expensive vase, break a laptop... Every year we have students who accidentally break something and this can be very costly for the host family and/or the student. So please, make sure that you are covered!

Conclusion

The best general advice AFS can give regarding issues of personal safety are:

- *Get to know the host culture well through questions, dialogue and discussion with your host family, peers, the AFS local contacts.*
- *Take any concerns that your host family and school have expressed seriously and follow their advice.*
- *As stated in the Agreement document you signed prior to leaving home, the National AFS office will make recommendations and give guidelines for physical welfare and security. Take this advice seriously and comply with these guidelines.*
- *Do not ignore your own « instinct » in any given situation or feel you have to compromise your own personal behavioral values and beliefs. These are valuable resources in making decisions about what to do.*
- *Try to be cautious without becoming paranoid, try to keep an open mind without being naïve and **make the best of your stay in our country.***