

Characteristics, Customs, Beliefs and Norms in Denmark

Families

1. In many families the children and parents will want to know *where* they are going *when* they will be home. Written messages and phone calls are quite common.
2. It is not accepted to borrow personal belongings from members of the family without asking permission – and the answer may often be 'no'.
3. A certain amount of privacy is important to Danish teenagers.
4. An outspoken hierarchy among sisters and brothers is a rare sight in Danish families, and the older sisters and brothers are not always expected to protect and educate the younger ones.
5. When grandparents grow old, it is not common for them to move in with the younger generations. If they cannot take care of themselves, they move into nursing homes or they receive help from the local community.
6. Many Danish families have pets (cats, dogs, birds, etc) which they may treat with extreme affection and some may even let them sleep in their beds.
7. TV is not necessarily turned on all day and in most families never during meals.
8. In most families – especially the younger generation – housework is shared, and hardly any families have maids. It is not unusual that men do the cooking – in fact cooking is a compulsory subject in the 5th or 6th grade at school, and boys and girls share all practical work evenly when participating in school camps etc.
9. To leave food on the plate after a meal is only accepted if the meal has been served in portions. When helping oneself, it is considered polite to finish everything.
10. Birthdays are special days. People receive gifts and many families have special rituals such as serving birthday cakes, singing a birthday song, having a birthday party etc. It is polite - and expected – to open gifts in front of the giver.
11. Since our climate is hardly ever hot, showering more than once daily is not common – and in many families long showers are not accepted due to the high energy prices and small hot water tanks. In spite of this, many Danish teenagers like to spend hours in the bathroom in front of the mirror...
12. Although most Danes are conscious about using water, we use hot water for washing the dishes, clothes and people. Many families have dish washing machines and most families have washing machines.

13. Bathrooms are always dry – water on the floor is not accepted.
14. Laundry is often sorted according to colors and fabrics – not according to which part of the body it is worn.
15. After use, the toilet paper is thrown into the toilet, and never into a wastebasket.
16. According to Danish law it is illegal to physically punish your children.

Attitude towards Education and Leisure

1. It is common for Danish teenagers to have great personal freedom. Many Danish parents will often spend a lot of time talking about their beliefs and expectations to their children in order to give them what we call ‘freedom with responsibility’. This does not mean that parents will accept all kinds of behavior from their children, but the rules may seem very unclear to people who are unfamiliar with our society.
2. Danish parents and teachers encourage children to be independent and to form their own opinions. Discussions between parents/teachers and children are therefore acceptable.
3. Respect for older people is not emphasized a lot when bringing up children.
4. It is common that young people move away from their families right after high school, even though they live in the same city – educational/financial support from the state makes this possible.
5. Although education is considered very important, parents will want their children to also spend time with friends and participate in after school activities, such as sports, music, scout groups etc. The ability to socialize with other people is considered important.
6. It is very common to share the costs of an outing or a date.
7. It is common for teenagers to have jobs after school to earn their own pocket money.

Alcohol and Smoking

1. Most Danes handle alcohol in a very relaxed way. Many families find it socially acceptable that teenagers drink as long as they can control themselves. Alcohol will often be available both at private and at school parties for the older students.
2. Smoking is common among Danish teenagers.

Sex

1. Nakedness does not necessarily signal sex. Many Danes look upon their own and other people's bodies in a very natural way, and they may therefore walk around in very little clothes within the home. Topless women at the beaches are very common.
2. Holding hands with people of the opposite sex is quite common.
3. It is acceptable to show affection in public to a person of the opposite sex.
4. Sex before marriage is accepted. Therefore, many couples live together without being married, and many parents accept overnight visits by their teenage children's boy or girl friend.
5. Sexual guidance is a compulsory subject in Danish schools – including information on contraception, AIDS etc.

Visiting People

1. When visiting people in their homes we take off our jackets or coats to show that we intend not to leave right away.
2. It is not unusual to wear shoes in the house – unless the weather is bad and the shoes are dirty. We will often ask the host if we should take off our shoes.
3. It is common that children and teenagers spend time together at each other's homes playing, talking, listening to music, having tea etc. in the child's or teenager's own room.

Behavior

1. Nose blowing is accepted, but sniffing is generally not accepted.
2. It is accepted to show your feelings to a certain extent –most Danes do not like to exaggerate. Most Danes do not smile when they are sad, angry, or worried.
3. Most Danes will give a direct answer to a question – if we mean 'no' we say it!
4. Avoiding eye contact is interpreted as a sign of insecurity and weakness.
5. Bargaining when shopping is seldomly accepted.
6. An extended system of public transportation and a relatively safe society makes getting around very easy. It is therefore common for teenagers to go on their own visiting friends, going to the movies, concerts, etc.