

At the end of their AFS exchange in South Africa, we asked some recent AFSers from the USA to answer two questions:

- ❑ What elements of your host culture, compared to US culture, did you find most difficult to adjust to in the areas of family, school and/or social life?
- ❑ Please note any advice you would like to share with AFSers destined for your host country.

Here are some of their responses:

The tidy house, and change in diet [were challenging]. It was also difficult being in a rough area at times and being the only white guy.

Sebastian, Semester, 2009

Make lots of friends; don't hold prejudices; don't feel privileged because of your skin color; if things aren't working then call your contact person; learn how to have fun with what you have.

Reid, Year, 2009

I would advise a flexible relaxed attitude. You must learn to "go with the flow" and refrain from doing things that would annoy your host family. In addition, you are not going there to party. Be safe, and focus on your project. However, with this said, if you feel as though you are being mistreated, misused, or violated, do not be afraid to speak out.

Haley, Year, 2010

Get active in your school and community. Try to give a little back into the community while you're there; it's a great way to get out when you're bored.

Samuel, Year, 2007

It was hard adjusting to the crime levels in South Africa. Where I live in Wisconsin, it's safe for me to walk around at night, but in South Africa, once the sun started setting, I wasn't allowed to walk outside. It was strange having to put my bag on the floor of the car so as not to get hijacked, and also having to set an alarm at night to prevent break-ins. The electric fences around all of the properties were a bit intimidating in the beginning, but you get used to it eventually. As long as you keep a reasonable head and are conscious about your surroundings, you'll be fine.

Kathryn, Semester, 2008

It was hard for me to adjust to asking for rides and not being able to walk or bike around (because of the crime). School was much different - I had to adjust to wearing a uniform, saying "sir" and "ma'am," standing up when the teacher enters the room, etc. And also it was hard for me to adjust to the racism that is prevalent in white South Africa.

Leland, Year, 2007

Keep a reasonable head and be conscious about your surroundings all the time. Don't let yourself be caught with just one group of friends. There are so many diverse people in South Africa, and it's valuable to make friends with them all.

Kathryn, Semester, 2008

Family dynamics were definitely the most difficult elements to adjust to in a new country. You must learn how to love a family that may have nothing in common with you.

Samuel, Year, 2007

Make an earnest effort to learn the language! If you show even the slightest effort to learn Afrikaans, Zulu, Xhosa...they will be delighted! Also try to be as outgoing as possible - buy a cellphone early on and take down all of your friends' numbers. Take a part in sport, even if you've never played it before.

Leland, Year, 2007

