Family Life

In cities, both extended family and nuclear family structures exist. In rural areas, there tend to be more extended family systems. Fathers are the primary bread winners in many families. There are situations where both parents are financial contributors and some in which the mothers are financially responsible for the family. Fathers are the main authority figures in Ghanaian households. Traditional gender roles are generally clear-cut between boys and girls in the family. This is more profound in rural and Muslim communities than in urban communities.

Siblings usually eat from the same bowls in the rural communities when they are younger. Family members do not necessarily have to wait for one another before they eat. Eating may not happen at the dining table and is not necessarily important family time. The communal lifestyle in Ghana does not encompass the concept of personal space and people are not very fussy about it. Ghanaians are not accustomed to the idea of taking individual or private time at home; spending much time to oneself may indicate there is something amiss.

Teen Life: Siblings sometimes share clothing, shoes and electronic gadgets, and it is not always necessary to ask permission. Most items are considered communal property of the family. Parents give teenagers pocket money. Teenagers usually do not work until after university. However, some teenagers are compelled to work by virtue of tough economic circumstances.

Responsibilities: Families that can afford it sometimes have house help for household chores. Children are generally assigned specific chores to do at home. Generally, there are different roles assigned to the two genders. Cooking is mainly done by the females of the family.

Parental Involvement: A very small percent of households have internet access at home. Many students have access to the internet only in public cafes. Students coming from urban settings may have workable internet skills, but those coming from rural areas will have minimal to no knowledge. There is communication between schools and parents, but to a limited extent. Parents monitor Ghanaian teenagers and parents will often dictate their plans for them.

Pets: Pets are not an integral part of the Ghanaian household. Cats may sometimes live in the house but dogs live in kennels or sleep outside on the compound. Most dogs are guard dogs and are not friendly. In the rural areas, dogs are also used as hunters.

Personal Interactions

Greeting someone is a sign of cordiality and harmony, so not greeting a familiar person is a sign of disharmony. Greetings are sometimes expected to spark off some amount of conversation. Being a little late is not considered rude as the general populace in Ghana is not usually on time. Time is generally referred to in the following increments: early morning, mid-morning, early afternoon, late afternoon, evening, early night, etc. Being even 20 minutes late to an appointment is acceptable.

Mixed Gender Socializing: Parents in Ghanaian society are more comfortable with their children socializing with the opposite sex once they are in their twenties. Some male students on program may not know how to interact appropriately with females in the U.S. They may misunderstand the casual interaction between boys and girls in the U.S. It is advised that male Ghanaian students have a trusted male coordinator or host father to guide them as to how to relate to females in America.

Friendships: Ghanaian teenagers sometimes socialize in groups, and sometimes one-on-one. Both ways are considered appropriate, and the choice is left up to the individual. Teenagers in Ghana make friends from family, neighborhood, and religious or school activities. It is normal for teenagers to give freely without asking to be paid back. In Ghana, when one is invited out, it is expected that the invitee pays the cost.

Communication Styles: Ghanaians use an indirect form of communication, and body language is as important as verbal communication. People in Ghana are expected to discern and read between the lines during communication. Negative emotions are expressed more modestly and with decorum to avoid hurting or offending people and may not be expressed at all if there is fear that hurting someone is unavoidable.

Eye Contact: Amongst the urban upper middle class and above, it is generally okay to make eye contact with elderly people when speaking with them. In rural areas, that same behavior is considered rude and extremely disrespectful. When a student looks away when responding to questions from elders, it is a sign of respect, and not a sign that the student is hiding something or being dishonest.
Religion: In Ghana, attending religious services is often a family event, and the social aspect of attending the services is being part of the community. This community aspect is often just as important as the religious aspect. Most students are enrolled in boarding school in Ghana and live with their peers at school. Students in Ghana cannot select their own classes. Evaluation is primarily based on exams, and before senior year, exams occur every trimester. During senior year, students take a national exam to obtain valid academic certificates. Homework is usually not graded. Students may not be aware of being scored in subjects like Choir and PE for academic purposes in the U.S. since this would be uncommon in Ghana.

Holidays: Eid al-Fitr is a national holiday in Ghana. The following are also nationally observed holidays: New Year’s Day; Independence Day (March 6); Easter (3 days); May Day (May 1); African Unity Day (May 25); Republic Day (July 1); Eid al-Fitr; Eid al-Adhs; Farmers' Day (first Friday of December); Christmas (December 25); and Boxing day (26 Dec).

Guest Culture: Guests are treated like celebrities. Ghanaians offer guests food and drinks as many times as possible and guests are given the best of everything and are made to always choose first. Guests are expected to be very polite and accept whatever the host offers even if they do not want what is being offered. Guest can politely decline, but with an explanation. Also guests must always be sensitive to the host's feelings as respect is paramount.

Lunch and Diets: In Ghana Teenagers are mostly given lunch money to buy hot school lunch, but each family is different. If they are in boarding school, the school provides hot lunch. The meat in Ghana is always halal and most families prepare food from scratch, however some families eat packaged food and meals.

Personal hygiene habits vary from person to person. Ghanaians will typically bathe twice a day. Bathroom styles differ between social and economic groups in Ghana. Students from rural settings will likely not be used to bath tubs or screened off bath areas. Towels are usually aired in the open to dry. Most Ghanaians teenagers have one towel in their bathroom to use to dry their body, hair, and face. It is generally thought to be unclean in Ghana to wear the same clothes two days in a row or to wear the same clothes twice without washing them. If a student is in a school uniform, church, or party clothes, he or she will change clothes upon returning home.