Family Life

In Kenya, the composition of the household depends on the type of family, culture, and location of the family, although most households will also include an extended family. Meals may be eaten together or separate, except on weekends or holidays when most families gather for a meal sometimes with the extended family. In some families both parents are financial contributors, but in most cases the father is the breadwinner of the family. In Kenya, the father is the head of the family while mothers are responsible for household and everyday matters.

Teen Life: Siblings share almost everything in Kenya, and not necessarily with permission. Personal space is not considered a big thing in the family since the family members are supposed to be very close to each other.

Responsibilities: Most families in Kenya hire house help for household chores, regardless of the income level of the family. Even very poor families keep household help usually in exchange for room and board. The adult women of the house are responsible for all housework. A student would only help if necessary. In Kenya, it is mainly the females who do the cooking. Females are responsible for light housework whereas boys are responsible for the more intensive hard work. In Kenya, part time jobs for teens are very rare. Often students obtain money from their parents and other family members. Students are not used to budgeting their money.

Parental Involvement: Parents supervise their children in using the internet, and usually monitor websites and limit the time spent on computers. However, most Kenyan families do not have internet access in the home, so students would be used to using a local internet cafe. It may be tempting for students who have never had 24-hour access to internet in the home to remain on the internet for long periods of time and access it with great frequency. In Kenya, parents are a big part of the students’ academic life. Generally, Kenyan teenagers are mostly dependent on their parents to make their decisions. Also, parents play a big role in shaping their children’s interests as following parents’ advice is considered very respectful. However, this varies from family to family, and can depend on the family’s status, religious, and cultural beliefs.

Pets: In Kenya, most families have cats as pets, while some will have dogs, which are mainly used as guard dogs. It is very rare for dogs to be kept in the house.

School

Classes: Kenyan students follow a prescribed national curriculum. If students are in private school, there may be some variation to the courses offered, but generally students cannot select their subjects or take courses at different levels of difficulty. Certain classes, such as mathematics and English, meet daily, while others meet at least four times a week. Students stay in the same classroom all day with teachers rotating to each classroom to teach throughout the day. Private schools have approximately 25 students per classroom, while public or government schools have classes of 50-70 students. Students are evaluated according to how they perform on their exams and tests. Homework and class participation are not calculated as part of the final grade and are not compulsory. Schools in Kenya are both co-ed and single gender. Students tend to have the same classmates for all four years of high school.

School Relationships: In Kenya, students mostly refer to their teachers as Mr., Mrs., Sir, or Madam to show respect for the teacher.

Extracurricular Activities: Most schools in Kenya have extracurricular activities such as sports and clubs, although there is not much emphasis put on these activities in comparison to academics. Parents concentrate more on their student's educational activities rather than extracurricular activities.

School Rules and Attire: Cell phones are not allowed to be used on school grounds. If students break schools rules, they can be punished severely with the punishment depending on level of punishable action. For fighting or bullying, the student involved may be given punishment such as cutting the grass of the school grounds and calling in the student's parents for a meeting with the principal. If extensive harm is done, the student may also be expelled from the school. For cheating, a student may lose marks on their exam.

Students also usually wear a uniform to school, which have regional, religious, climatic, and other variations. Both boys and girls wear a shirt, tie, and either a sweater or vest; boys wear pants and girls wear skirts. Uniforms for girls at Muslim schools also include a head covering.

Returning from Exchange: When students return to Kenya, they continue from where they left off. For example, if a student left in August having completed two school terms of Form 1 (equivalent to 9th grade in the U.S. system), then when s/he comes back, s/he will continue with the final 3rd term of Form 1 in the fall. Catching up with the Kenyan educational system upon return becomes quite hard because of these differences in the two education systems.
Religion: Religion is a huge part of Kenyan families and usually brings about the aspect of family-centered culture. Religious beliefs are very strong particularly for Christian, Muslim and Hindu communities. Religious services are communal and tend to last many hours. For example, for most Christian families Sundays are dedicated to religious service and family members may spend the day in such event. For Muslim families, Friday prayers are an important part of their religious services and everyone at home is expected to dedicate about one hour at midday for this service. Other days also have religious activities and mostly prayers that often take place at home or selected church based places.

The Kenyan population is made up of about 80% Christian (including Catholics, Protestants, and other types of Christians), 12% Muslim, and the remaining 8% is made up of other religions including Hinduism, Baha'i, and traditional beliefs/religions. The Kenya YES cohort takes roughly the same proportion with majority being Christians and the others Muslim

Holidays:
Religious holidays that are recognized in the constitutions include: Easter holidays, Muslim Eid celebrations, and Christmas. Sunday is a public holiday. These holidays are considered official holidays and members of the respective religious group dedicate the day in performing religious activities in a communal way.

Guest Culture:
Guests are seen as very special and blessing to the family. Food/drink will certainly be offered at home to a guest. Declining is not an option and may often be considered disrespectful. Family may be very insisting for the guest to take the food/drink even if in a small portion.

Lunch and Diets:
For students in day schools, parents usually prepare and pack lunch for their child. In most cases, the students will be given lunch money to buy lunch at school cafeterias.

As Kenya has many diverse cultural communities, food restrictions depend on cultural and religious customs. For example, Muslim communities have places to purchase halal meats, and most Muslim teenagers will eat food that is halal. Fad diets are not common. Most foods are prepared from scratch.

Kenyan teenagers generally take a quick shower once a day and sometimes twice if they are involved in physical activities. It is generally thought to be unclean to wear the same clothes two days in a row or to wear the same clothes twice without washing them. The bathroom is shared by all family members and teenagers are responsible for taking care of their toiletries. Most Kenyan teenagers have one towel in their bathroom to use to dry their body (and maybe a separate towel to dry their hair or face). Shoes are taken off in the home as a sign of respect and to maintain a clean house.