Family Life

Usually in Kuwait the household consists of parents, their children, and sometimes grandparents. Sometimes the household is very big and also includes uncles and extended family. Children do not leave the house after college, but rather they leave when they have found a job or get married.

In many Kuwaiti families mothers do not work. However, if she does, the father is still considered to hold primary financial responsibility. Both parents may expect to be seen as equal authority figures in all household decisions, but in some families most of the authority goes to the father. In Kuwait, meals are often eaten all together as a family. Family members are expected to have time to pursue their own interests, and family members must respect each other’s desires and wishes.

Teen Life: If a child needs to borrow something from his or her sibling, they must ask first. Teenagers are expected to interact respectfully with their parents at all times. However, it is fine to be informal with their siblings.

Responsibilities: In Kuwait, it is very common for a family to have a housekeeper. Usually boys and girls are not asked to do household chores. Teenagers in Kuwait rarely cook for themselves and they tend to be rather dependent, however they are responsible for managing their studies and cleaning up after themselves. Before coming on program, staff in Kuwait provide students with a cooking workshop to prepare them for the possibility of cooking in the U.S. Most Kuwaiti teenagers do not have part-time jobs because the concept of working while studying does not exist in Kuwait. Rather, parents are expected to give monthly allowances.

Parental Involvement: In Kuwait, it is difficult to monitor what each student does online because most kids have their own laptops and they use them in their own rooms or when they go out to cafes with their friends. Parents are in direct contact with schools and monitor their kids’ academic progress regularly. Most teenagers are dependent upon their parents’ decisions.

Pets: It is very uncommon for a family in Kuwait to have pets in the home. Kuwaiti students may initially feel uncomfortable if pets are given “free reign” of the house.

School

Classes: In Kuwait, students are mainly evaluated on homework, quizzes, midterm, and final exams. Class participation does not count in the public school system, but in private schools it does. In Arabic language public and private schools, students are divided into classes and they stay in the same classroom while teachers rotate. In non-Arabic language private schools, students usually have each subject in different classrooms. All public schools in Kuwait are gender segregated; however, some private schools are co-ed. Students in Arabic language public and private schools cannot choose their classes, while some English language schools do allow students to select their courses. Generally, students take seven subjects at one time. English language schools sometimes offer classes at varying levels of difficulty.

School Relationships: In Kuwait, students usually use the title “Mr.” or “Ms.” with the teacher’s first name. Their relationship is friendly, but still formal.

Extracurricular Activities: Schools focus mainly on education and do not offer extracurricular activities; students can participate in extracurricular activities only in formal institutes or sports clubs. Parents in Kuwait are not involved in their kids’ extracurricular activities.

School Rules and Attire: The punishment for cell phone usage is not severe, but cell phones are prohibited from classrooms. Additionally, all schools in Kuwait have uniforms. Each private school has its own uniform with different styles and colors. Public schools have a standard uniform; for boys the uniform is grey pants and a white shirt, and for girls the uniform is a long grey dress. Schools in Kuwait have strict policies regarding fighting and bullying. Students would be issued warnings, and potentially suspended or expelled. If students are caught cheating, they will get a zero on their exam and their parents would be called to the school. If the student is caught cheating again, they are either suspended or expelled.
Religion: Most families encourage their kids to attend religious services. Usually boys go to mosque with their fathers every Friday to pray, however usually only adult women go to mosque to pray.

Holidays: During Ramadan, students fast from dawn until sunset. Eid al-Fitr, which occurs after Ramadan, is a religious and family event during which parents give money to their children. Other holidays include Eid al-Adha and national holidays, such as Labor Day and Independence Day.

Guest Culture: In Kuwait, guests are treated nicely and respectfully. Families will offer food multiple times as it is considered impolite to only offer once. The guest may be shy to accept the first time, however after being offered food two or three times, the guest should accept the food offering.

Lunch and Diets: For lunch, students either bring food from home that is prepared by their mothers or they buy food from the school cafeteria. The main meal in Kuwait is lunch, and families gather for the meal between 2-3pm. People in Kuwait only eat halal meat; however, some people follow a vegetarian diet. Additionally, “fad diets” are not popular in Kuwait.

Kuwait City

Population 2,832,776

Square Miles 11,071

Currency Kuwaiti Dinar

Literacy rate 96.5%

Mixed Gender Socializing: Having friends of the opposite sex is typically not acceptable in Kuwaiti society.

Friendships: The idea of friendship and what defines a friend varies from one person to the other. Kuwaiti 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 meet most of their friends through common activities, and not necessarily from family or neighborhood connections. Amongst good friends, it is common and normal to share money. However, this does not exist in weaker relationships. Teens in Kuwait usually spend time together at cafes and malls. Parents are well informed of where their children are spending time.

Communication Styles: Kuwaitis usually communicate directly; this is the norm for all Kuwaitis.

Eye Contact: As a sign of respect, kids do not make direct eye contact with adults. Instead, they tend to look towards the ground when they are spoken to by adults.

Cultural Norms: Kuwaiti teenagers tend to show negative emotions quite freely amongst their peers and family. Personal space varies across Kuwaiti culture and depends on how the student was raised, as well as the environment. Being on time is not important for many people in Kuwait.

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Kuwaiti 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 in Kuwait to wear the same clothes two days in a row. In Kuwait, different clothes are worn every day, but jeans may be worn multiple times before a wash. Kuwaiti teenagers are expected to keep their bathrooms clean after using them (towels are hung up, and hygiene products are put away). Students do not pay attention to keeping the bathroom dry. Most teenagers do not change clothes upon entering the house, unless if they are changing out of their school uniform.

Personal Hygiene

Returning from Exchange: The Ministry of Education requests that all students accepted in to the YES program be placed in the right grade level before coming on program, eliminating the need for students to repeat the year upon their return. As academics in Kuwait are very difficult, students from public schools find it hard to return and study their main subjects in Arabic as they used to before their year in the U.S. Therefore, many of these students end up transferring to an English language school.