In Mali, most households have parents, grandparents, children, aunts, uncles or cousins living in the same house. Most of the time, men are financially responsible for the family, but women contribute whenever necessary. From the outside it may be perceived as though it is the father who has the authority to make decisions, however, the mother is also behind all the important decisions in the family. In the urban areas of Mali where many students are from, meals may be eaten all together as a family, or separately depending on family members’ schedules. In the rural areas, families eat together during all the three meals of the day. In Mali, it is considered respectful to allow family members to spend time by themselves, to pursue their own activities, to socialize with friends or to simply relax.

**Teen Life:** Most of the time, siblings and friends share clothes, shoes, and games. Depending on the relationship, they may or not ask permission to use other items. Teenagers are generally dependent upon their parents.

**Responsibilities:** Students are responsible for keeping track of extracurricular activities, keeping up with academics, taking care of the family courtyard, and his or her bedroom. Financially, they are expected to budget their money for social activities and for buying personal items. In the capital city of Mali, most families have housekeepers. Girls help mothers with household activities and boys help fathers with the outdoor activities and chores. In rural areas women do most of the work and men are responsible financially and for ensuring there is enough food. Generally, students obtain money from parents or relatives, but some do work or sell small items to get extra money. Boys generally don't cook nor do they do their own laundry.

**Parental Involvement:** Malian parents do not get involved with their students extracurricular activities. Many Malian parents are in direct contact with their children's school and are kept aware of their academic progress. Generally in Mali, children know more about new technology than parents, but parents do their best to protect their children. Most students don't have a computer at home. It may be possible that if Malian students are put in an environment where they have easy access to a computer, they may be tempted to use computer privileges to an excess. Overall, children normally use mobile devices for internet browsing. Very few parents control their children's usage of computer/mobile/Internet.

**Pets:** A lot of families have pets. They are normally kept outside. Malians usually have dogs and cats for pets and sometimes pigeons.

---

**School**

In Mali, students generally have weekly tests, but each teacher also has the ability to test any student at any time to assess his or her level and to provide opportunities to advance independently.

**Classes:** Students stay in the same classroom and teachers move from class to class. Boys and girls study in the same classes in Mali and are not seated apart in class. There are however, special Catholic schools for girls only and the merdersa (also known as ‘madrasa’ or school) for Arabic language learning students where boys and girls are separated. Students do not have an opportunity to study subjects at different levels of difficulty or to choose their school subjects.

**School Relationships:** Students show respect by addressing their teachers as “Sir” or “Mrs.”

**Extracurricular Activities:** Most of the time, students participate in extracurricular activities through the community. Extracurricular activities can also be found at school, though typically only through private Catholic schools. Sports like soccer and gymnastics, and clubs are available for the students.

**School Rules and Attire:** Schools prohibit the use of cell phones and fighting is not allowed. Most private schools have a uniform. Students from public schools do not have a specific uniform. They just need to dress decently. Those from private schools have various uniforms; normally a dress for girls and a shirt and pants for boys.
Religion: Amongst most families in Mali, going to the mosque is an individual activity. However, you will find families who consider it a family activity. Ramadan, Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha, are celebrated with family. It is considered very important to be with family during celebrations. Many Malians return to family villages to celebrate important holidays.

Holidays: In Mali they celebrate Christmas, New Year and all the important holidays linked to African history and at international level such as Labor Day which is May 1st and African Day is May 25th. Holidays are celebrated with family. During the two major Islamic feasts, people will visit relatives to make wishes and have fun.

Guest Culture: Guests normally accept food or drink offered to them because refusing it could be considered rude. If the food or drink can cause health problems, the person will just explain that.

Lunch and Diets: Food portions are large in Mali. Eating leftovers is a common practice too. Students normally go home for lunch, but some buy food from the school restaurant and others pack a cold lunch. However, Malians prefer hot meals.

It is typical for Malian teens to shower two to three times per day. It is acceptable to wear the same clothes two days in a row and to wear the same clothes twice before washing. The U.S. concept of bathroom hygiene is completely different than that in Mali. Leaving the bathroom floor or walls wet is common in Mali, and occurs when Muslims do ablutions before prayer. Some students face challenges adapting to the cleanliness of the bathroom in the U.S. Most Malian teenagers have one towel in their bathroom to use. Malians typically change clothes upon entering the house after work or school.

Mixed Gender Socializing: In most Malian families, it is not acceptable for girls and boys to socialize with the opposite sex. However, there are families who accept it.

Friendships: Malian teenagers sometimes socialize in groups, and sometimes one-on-one. Both ways are considered appropriate and the choice is left up to the individual. Malian teenagers make most of their friends through common activities, and not necessarily from family or neighborhood connections. The concept of sharing money depends on the relationship; close friends share money or borrow from each other. Friendship means mutual support, sharing the same interests, hanging out together, etc.

Eye Contact: In Mali, eye contact with an elder is considered disrespectful.

Returning from Exchange: Students normally pass to the next class after their exchange year. However, some parents prefer that their children repeat the year. Those who do their senior year in America have 3 options:
Option 1: They prepare to do the baccalaureate exam while in the United States because they usually return in time for the exam.
Option 2: Some look for admission in American universities before coming back. Therefore, they go back to the USA once they have their visa.
Option 3: Others prefer to repeat the year to take the baccalaureate exam.