South Africa

Family Life

In South Africa, most households consist of parents, or a parent, and their children. Rarely do grandparents, aunts, uncles or cousins live in the same house, but extended relatives may come to stay if the financial situation requires it. While it is important to always be respectful, many South African teenagers interact informally with all of their family members.

It is common in South Africa for the father to be the primary financial provider of the family; however, this is changing in modern families where many mothers work as well. In most cultures within South Africa the mother is the main authoritative figure when it comes to household decisions.

In South Africa, meals may be eaten all together as a family, or separately depending on family members' schedules. Often both boys and girls will have to cook for themselves when they get home from school.

It is normal for family members to be allowed time to pursue individual interests; it is, however, important and also considered respectful that the rest of the family is informed of these activities. It is also expected that these activities do not interfere with family activities.

Teen Life: Regarding belongings, if a South African child owns something, it is generally considered his or her own, and not understood to be the shared property of siblings, including clothing. When siblings want to borrow something from each other, it is typically understood that they must ask first. In most cases, the parents would also need to be consulted.

Responsibilities: South African teenagers do not generally divide tasks or responsibilities based on gender, either amongst their peers or amongst their family. South African household members, including children, are often given specific tasks or chores. The chores may include cleaning one's own room or bathroom, doing their own laundry, and generally contributing to the upkeep of the house. It is also common for households to have a maid come in twice a week or so to do cleaning.

Students are required to take responsibility for their school work, doing the dishes, and generally cleaning up after themselves. Students do not receive pocket money on a regular basis and ask their parents for what they need and the specific amount.

South African teenagers are often expected to plan their daily routines with their parents at least two days in advance, and then work out a course of action with their parents about how they will get to where they need to be.

Parental Involvement: Schools in South Africa keep parents aware of their children's academic progress at all times. In South Africa, parents often monitor what their children do online in the interest of their children's safety. Parents also may limit what sites a child may visit online, or how much time the child spends on the internet. However, most homes in South Africa do not have internet connectivity, and students often surf the web at school or at an internet café where there is no parent observation.

Pets: Many South African families have pets, often cats or dogs. Pets are not thought of as members of the family, and are typically not allowed inside the house.

Personal Interactions

Mixed Gender Socializing: It is perfectly acceptable for South African teens to have friends of the opposite sex and to socialize with them individually; however, most are aware of cultural boundaries depending on the rules of the family. For instance, a boy is not allowed to go into a girl's room and vice-versa, as families see this as a sign of great disrespect.

Friendships: South African teenagers socialize in groups and sometimes one-on-one. Both ways are considered appropriate and the choice is left up to the individual. Most teenagers make their friends through neighborhood connections and school connections, and family also plays a big role in determining with whom a student socializes. Teens often spend a lot of time with their cousins. South African teenagers often think of peers with whom they are only casually associated as friends. Friends are also confidants, and are therefore trusted with personal information. It is uncommon for South African teenagers to share money with each other.

Communication Styles: In South Africa, greeting someone you see every day is generally expected, but the greetings are not necessarily invitations to a larger conversation. South Africans communicate very indirectly and often hide their opinions, especially if it is a negative one about an elder. Teenagers are generally comfortable expressing negative emotions to a friend, but with family they are often more cautious, especially if the family member is an authoritative member of the family or an elder. A South African YES student may be uncomfortable with sharing their feelings with authority figures.

Eye Contact: Eye contact is race-dependent in South Africa; in the black cultures, it is regarded as disrespectful to look an elder in the eye, in white cultures it is considered disrespectful not to look an elder in the eye.

Cultural Norms: Students do spend a lot of time in the week with family, but may expect to spend a Saturday with their friends. Personal space is relative and individual time alone is rare.

South Africans are punctual. Being on time is considered a sign of respect, and being even a little bit late to an appointment is noticed, but a grace period of 10 minutes is usually given depending on the situation.
Religion: In South Africa, Ramadan and Eid al-Fitr are not celebrated nationally although many people do know about them because of the Muslim population and often great respect is shown to Muslims on these days.

One of the things that most South African families do together is attend religious services, especially on days like Christmas, Eid al-Fitr, Diwali, and Easter. Most places of worship are also used by the community for other activities.

For major holidays, such as Christmas or birthdays, South African teenagers are expected to give gifts to family members and close friends, but not necessarily to all of their friends.

Holidays: South Africa has a very rich history, and because of this there are many public holidays. On these days, the country as a whole usually commemorates what happened on that day in history. Because of this diversity, the country also celebrates a number of religious holidays. One of the most celebrated holidays is Heritage Day. On Heritage Day, the country celebrates their rich cultures and traditions. Most people dress in their traditional attire on this day and sometimes for the whole month of September. During this time, people will also take traditional dishes to work and school, and share them with friends who also do the same. Other holidays include: Eid al-Fitr, Diwali, Christmas, Easter, and Human Rights Day (21 March).

Guest Culture: Guests are considered to be a blessing and are very important in most South African homes. Hosts are expected to treat guests with respect and show appreciation. The guests are also expected to be appreciative and respectful towards their hosts.

Lunch and Diets: Different schools have different lunch policies. However, most students pack their own lunch. Food portions in South Africa are considered average when compared to American portions, but this is also dependent on individuals. If a serving is large, most people in South African will have leftovers later; the same principle applies when eating out, it is normal for people to take a “doggy bag.” In South Africa, Halal meat is easy to find and very accessible. South African mothers cook every night with carry-out food is considered a treat once or twice a week.

Personal Hygiene: The cost of electricity and water is high in South Africa, so 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 South Africa to wear the same clothes two days in a row or without washing. South African teenagers are expected to keep the bathroom clean and dry. After showering, towels are hung up to dry and hygiene products are put away.

Teenagers in most South African households have chores, and at times these chores include washing their own clothes. Some households have washing machines and driers, but most households do their washing by hand and as such, most teenagers will not know how to use America style appliances.