In Turkey, the family is the dominant source for creating a sense of belonging for both males and females. Individuals within Turkish society are generally loyal to and have close relationships with their families. It is considered desirable to have grandparents and other relatives around, and that is generally the case, except in the largest cities. Regardless, relatives do travel back and forth and stay closely connected. It is not unusual for young adults to help their younger siblings with school expenses, or to help elderly relatives with their needs.

The traditional male-dominated family and authority structure is becoming less pronounced in the urban areas of Turkey. The Turkish mother may be considered the “ruler” of her household, and she and the rest of her family considers it her responsibility to dote upon her family. This may include waking children up in the morning. The mother assumes all responsibility for household chores. YES Turkish students might have the mindset that “Mom runs the house, manages the money, cooks, irons, serves, and educates the children to assume responsibility.” Turkish fathers, on the other hand, generally fulfill the role of the financial provider and are usually not responsible for household chores or cooking. In Turkey, meals may be eaten all together as a family, or separately depending on family members’ schedules.

Teen Life: Most teenagers in Turkey do not work and are only responsible for their academic success. Families give pocket money to the teenagers and, depending on the amount given, families might expect that the teens budget the money on their own. If a Turkish child owns something, it is generally his or her own and not understood to be the shared property of siblings. This includes clothing. When siblings want to borrow something from each other, it is generally understood that they must ask first.

Responsibilities: Chores are generally done by the parents. Teenagers sometimes help, but most male teenagers do not even help with the cleaning. Chores are an area where the contrast between American culture and Turkish culture is clear and obvious, and thus, where conflicts may arise for YES Turkish students. Generally, it is the parents who cook in Turkey.

Parental Involvement: Turkish 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. In Turkey, it is considered respectful to allow family members to regular, individual time by themselves to pursue their own activities, socialize with friends, or to simply relax. Many Turkish parents are in direct contact with their children’s school and are kept aware of their academic progress. Turkish parents are often actively involved in supporting or helping to arrange their children’s extracurricular activities.

Pets: In Turkey, dogs are most often acquired for the purposes of protection as a watch dog, or for special use by hunters or police. They are not commonly viewed as domestic pets.

Mixed Gender Socializing: It is perfectly acceptable for Turkish teens to have friends of the opposite sex and to socialize with them individually.

Friendships: Turkish teenagers sometimes socialize in groups, and sometimes one-on-one. Both ways are considered appropriate and the choice is left up to the individual. Most teenagers have made their friends through school, but neighborhood bonds are strong in Turkey, so they can become friends with their neighbors, as well. Friendship means bonds and sharing in Turkish culture, so even though students might socialize with many teenagers and call them friends, they only have a limited number of close friends. It’s common to borrow from or lend money to trusted friends.

Communication Styles: Turkish students will tend to use a more indirect communication style and will be used to indirectly confronting people, for instance, addressing their concerns to someone other than the person to whom they intend the criticism. It is important in Turkey to avoid conflict and therefore ‘save face’. Turkish students may not want to openly disagree and will instead become sullen and resentful, but unwilling to discuss what has made them uncomfortable or offended them.

Eye Contact: Eye contact is important in Turkish culture, as a sign of respect when speaking with others. Teenagers are expected to make eye contact with adults.

Cultural Norms: The concept of personal space is small in Turkey, and people tend to have more physical contact while they are communicating. Friends kiss each other on the cheek when they meet. The same holds true for family members. Turkish people tend to view time as unlimited and flowing, and much greater flexibility exists around deadlines and schedules. Attending to relationships with others is more important than being punctual, and cutting a conversation short in order to be able to make another meeting on time could be seen as a sign of disrespect.
School

In Turkey, school hours vary from school to school, however most school days start at 8am and end at 3pm.

Classes: In Turkey, each class is 45 minutes long with 5-10 minute breaks in between and a longer lunch break. Students remain in one classroom throughout the school day and teachers rotate. Students cannot study subjects at different levels of difficulty. Turkish students take 12-15 courses each semester. These courses include: mathematics, science, foreign language, Turkish literature, history, geography, physical education, and more. Most subjects are compulsory, but there are also optional courses such as sociology and logic.

Out of 100 points scale, 50 is the lowest passing grade. Daily homework may be given in some classes, but it does not contribute to the student's final grade. Turkish students are generally not accustomed to doing incremental work.

School Relationships: Teachers are highly respected in Turkey. As a general rule, teachers are not addressed by their first name or a nickname out of respect for their authority and age. Students can raise their hand to make or argue a point in an indirect way, but they would rarely argue or contradict a teacher directly. In Turkey it is not the norm to know teachers on a personal level outside of class.

Extracurricular Activities: Most public schools in Turkey do not offer clubs, sports, or art programs. Students would arrange for these activities independent of the school structure.

School Rules and Attire: The Ministry of Education has a policy against fighting, bullying, and cheating, which all schools are required to implement.

Returning from Exchange: Upon their return, if a Turkish YES student studied 10th or 11th grade in the U.S., they are able to continue their studies from the next grade. However, if a YES student studied in the 11th grade in Turkey and was supposed to study 12th grade in the U.S., they are required to repeat the year, unless they return from U.S. with a high school diploma.

Food and Culture

Religion: Islam in Turkey is adapted to modern life and may not be as traditionally followed. Many Turks value the moral and spiritual bases of Islam, and revere it as a guide to right living and ethical conduct. Religious practices in Turkey are voluntary rather than obligatory. The approach to religion in Turkey is considered very personal.

Holidays: End of Ramadan Festivities (Eid al-Fitr) and the Sacrifice Feast (Eid al-Adha) are the most commonly observed religious holidays in Turkey. These holidays are times when extended families come together, and Turkish students might feel more homesick during these days.

Guest Culture: Adults, youth, and close friends give and receive gifts on New Year’s in Turkey.

Lunch and Diets: Almost all meat sold in Turkey is halal. Pork is sold only in big grocery stores and most people do not eat pork. Generally, dinners are cooked at home and if there are any leftovers it is kept and re-heated the next day. Students are used to eating cold lunches as well as hot lunches at school, depending whether or not their school has a cafeteria.

Personal Hygiene

Turkish students typically take long showers two or three times a week rather than quick daily showers. In Turkey, re-using a towel/bathrobe for 1-2 weeks is normal. Turkish children, in general, are used to their mothers picking up after them, so it will take participants some time learning how to clean the bathroom while on program. Wearing the same clothes for more than one day might be considered normal. Sweaters and trousers are generally worn multiple times, especially in the winter time. Turkish teenagers are likely to have never used a washing machine in their lives, and they would not be familiar with how to run the programs or how much detergent/fabric softener to use. Most homes in Turkey do not have drying machines, and they line-dry their clothes. Students may not be aware that some fabrics could shrink when tumble dried or lose their shape when dried in an electric clothes dryer.