



*Conectando Vidas, Compartiendo Culturas*



# SAFETY TIPS

## 2021-22

**A Few Pointers on Safety and  
Security for AFS Participants in  
Ecuador**

# GENERAL ADVICE BY AFS INTERNATIONAL

A primary objective of experimental learning programs such as those offered by AFS is to help the participant learn through observation, question, dialogue, discussion and experience. From experience, AFS staff and volunteers understand that the opportunity to learn is great, but it is not necessarily easy. Participants encounter complex situations along the way and there is potential for confusion, fear and misunderstanding. If participants are left to their own devices, the consequences could be very distressing. For these reasons, with the help of host families, local community AFS contacts and project personnel, AFS has devised the system of "Program Support" for all participants providing a wide range of supportive activities and services. The purpose is to provide a "Safety Net"... a consistently supportive environment in which participants can ask questions, obtain advice and help.

AFS cannot supply all the possible answers but through our support systems, we can help to guide participants towards asking the right questions.

It is not possible to try to anticipate all possible situations pertaining to individual safety concerns. Many of these issues are specific to individual countries or parts of a single country. In general, AFS recommends talking with the host family, AFS local committee members and staff from the host project soon after the participant arrives at the host family home about any of the information in this guidebook and any question participants may have about specific personal issues.

AFS suggests that participants ask their host family about specific situations about which they are concerned or worried, recognizing that most of the information about the host country, prevalent in movies and in media publications, may not be accurate for the country or the specific area in which the family lives.

Within this context, what follows are some general tips and suggestions.

## THREE BASIC RECOMMENDATIONS

1. One way for you to be prepared for any problem is to carry a photocopy of your passport on your purse or wallet and your AFS ID card (provided once you are in Ecuador). You should also carry your host family's home and work telephone numbers, and the numbers for your AFS volunteers, the AFS Ecuador's National Office and the AFS Ecuador emergency system.
2. Before agreeing to go out with your friends, you should ask for permission from your host parents. Always make it a rule to tell them your plans: where you are going, who you are going with, what you are going to do and when you are returning home.
3. In case you have any doubts, always ask!

## IN OR AROUND THE HOME

In general, the family is not likely to know what you are worried about and needs to be informed about this by you. For example, such questions as "I have heard it is unsafe to walk around outside after dark, is this true here? Is it safe to wear my jewelry to school, or work?"

AFS encourages you to ask the family about how they secure their home, for example: How should you respond when a stranger calls at the door? Will you receive a house key? Who can you call if you arrive home without a key or there is no one in the house? Your neighbors? Which ones? What should you do in the event of an earthquake or some other disaster? What does your family advise about answering the door when you are home alone? Please keep in mind that doors are locked at all times in Ecuadorian homes, and you should adopt this practice.

Host families will usually explain about making telephone calls, but may not realize that you may have concerns about how to answer the telephone, especially if you are not comfortable in using the host country language and are not yet familiar with people who may be calling. AFS encourages you to ask your host parents how you should respond when answering the telephone. What information should you give? What information should you not give?

### **These are some helpful questions that you should ask your host family:**

- 1) Do you always lock your doors and windows? When if not always?
- 2) Am I going to have a house key? If not, where do I find a key to open a locked door from the inside?
- 3) Do you have a first aid equipment box? Where is it?
- 4) Do you have a fire extinguisher? Where do you keep it?
- 5) What should I do if an emergency occurs? Who should I call?
- 6) How should I answer the phone? What information should I not give out to strangers?
- 7) Where do you keep the emergency telephone numbers?
- 8) What should I do if I am alone and a stranger is at the door? What should I tell him/her?
- 9) Are there any appliances, such as a water heater, that could cause a problem and that I should be aware of?

# OUTSIDE THE HOME

You should be aware that in countries or in communities with a high poverty rate there may be higher incidents of crime or violence, (burglaries, purse snatching, thefts, assault, pick pocketing). AFS encourages you to let your host parents know whenever you are concerned or frightened. Ask them what they recommend to help you feel more secure.

When you are going out, AFS suggests that you inform your host family about where you are going and leave a telephone number - if possible - of where you will be. Your host family knows more about the local community than you do and is best prepared to give you advice about places it would be better for you to avoid and how best to get around. In general, you should take their advice seriously and follow their recommendations. In case you decide to come back home at a different time than what your host parents were told, make sure you call them first so that they can expect your arrival and do not get worried. In some communities, where people are more concerned about safety, arriving late at home unexpectedly may lead your hosts to take you by a stranger trying to get into their house or apartment.

Like in any other country, you should be cautious: there may be some places in local areas where you should avoid going, you should always dress in an appropriate manner, you should always be careful about your belongings (cameras, bags, books, etc). A good way to do this is to watch carefully what the other members of your family do, how they dress, what kind of jewelry they use and when. Find out some of the local security habits by talking to them.

In general, you should try to avoid being alone late at night: if you are walking make sure that the roads are well lit and are used by local people. Avoid lonely roads and desolate spots because these places might be dangerous. When walking in crowded areas you should take care of your valuables because pick pocketing is more common in crowded areas, especially on buses.

In Ecuador, as in many other countries, the traffic keeps to the right. The traffic is known to be rather chaotic and you will need to pay special attention when you walk or cross the streets. When riding buses, be aware that the driver may not always fully stop for you to get on or off. Riding cabs alone late at night is something that you may want to avoid, especially if you are a female.

As an AFS participant you are not permitted to drive any kind of motorized vehicle. Although in Ecuador a person must be 18 years old to get an automobile driver's license, we suggest that the AFS participants do not get into any motor vehicle with a younger driver, someone without a license, or someone who has consumed any alcohol or made use of drugs. If you are in this situation, you should contact your host family and they will tell you what to do to get home or a place where you should go. Remember - hitchhiking is forbidden!

Because of the country's topography, and also lack of proper maintenance, most Ecuadorian roads are dangerous. In addition to this, many professional drivers (i.e. bus, cab drivers) tend to be reckless and, in general, people are not as respectful of traffic laws as they may be in other countries. Because of this, traveling out of town by bus during the night must be avoided at all costs. It is not that accidents may not happen also during the day, but people tend to be more alert at this time, and the visibility provided by sunlight may help a driver react more appropriately to the unexpected.

Highway robbery is something not uncommon (bus drivers stop along the road to pick up passengers), again especially at night. Also, cases have been reported of thieves acting

friendly and drugging a passenger to induce sleep through a cigarette, a piece of candy or a drink that has been generously offered --and innocently accepted.

## **YOUR PERSONAL BELONGINGS**

Always keep your valuables locked in a safe place. Since many Ecuadorian homes have domestic help, usually poorly paid, it may be tempting for maids and other house help to see money, jewelry, or even small appliances lying around.

Avoid taking a lot of money or expensive jewelry to school or work. You should avoid lending money or personal belongings such as expensive pens, etc. to classmates or coworkers. Even if you lend small change, you may not receive it back, and it all adds up in the end.

Although not very common, there have been a few cases when host family members have borrowed money from their AFS participant and almost invariably, the loan has not been paid back. Please abstain from lending money to anyone, since this is the type of thing that may deteriorate a relationship, and affect your finances. If confronted with such a situation and you feel that you cannot deal with it on your own, please seek the help of an AFS volunteer or staff member. But please do it before you have given any money away, since it will be virtually impossible for us to be of real help after the fact. And never trust anyone the management of your own money!

Please remember that your passport is a very valuable possession. We suggest that you normally carry a photocopy with you, rather than the actual document.

Also try to carry your backpack in the front and pay attention to your wallet, purse and other valuable things while walking in crowded streets or riding on buses.

## **CIVIL UNREST**

Political demonstrations occur frequently throughout Ecuador. During demonstrations, protesters often block city streets and rural highways, including major arteries such as the Pan American Highway, disrupting public and private transportation. Protesters sometimes burn tires, throw rocks, damage cars and other personal property, and on occasion detonate small improvised explosive devices. Police response to demonstrations varies, but may include water cannons and tear gas. You should avoid areas where demonstrations are in progress and be prepared with back-up transportation plans. Peaceful demonstrations can turn violent with little or no warning, and you could become a target.

## **“SECUESTRO EXPRESS” TAXI ASSAULTS**

Robberies and assaults against taxi passengers, known locally as “secuestro express” (express kidnappings), continue to present a significant safety concern, especially in Guayaquil and Quito. Shortly after the passenger enters a taxi, the vehicle is typically intercepted by armed accomplices of the driver, who threaten passengers with weapons, rob passengers of their personal belongings, and force victims to withdraw money from ATMs.

Increasingly, victims have been physically attacked during these incidents. In the Guayaquil and Quito areas, you should call to order a taxi by phone, typically from a service recommended by your host family. If you must hail a taxi on the street, seek out those that are officially registered and in good condition. Registered taxis in Ecuador are usually yellow, display matching unit numbers on their windshields and doors, feature a taxi cooperative name on the door, and are identified with an orange license plate. Still, be aware that passengers have been victimized even in taxis that meet these criteria. If you become a victim of express kidnapping and/or robbery, cooperation with the assailant usually results in the best outcome, as nothing material is as valuable as your life.

## **NON-VIOLENT ROBBERIES**

Pick-pocketing, purse-snatching, robbery, bag-slashing are the most common types of crimes committed against people throughout Ecuador and incidents have increased significantly in recent years. Pickpockets and other petty thieves are particularly active in airports, restaurants, on public transportation, in crowded streets, bus terminals, public markets, and grocery stores. Backpackers are frequently targeted for robbery, as are travelers carrying laptop computer bags. On buses, luggage stowed below the bus or at a traveler's feet is sometimes stolen. Thieves in Ecuador often distract the victim, sometimes by purposefully spilling liquid on the victim and pretending to help the victim clean it up, while accomplices snatch the victim's bag or pick the victim's pocket. To lower your risk of these or other nonviolent crimes, leave valuables in a safe place, or don't travel with them.

Avoid wearing obviously expensive jewelry or designer clothing, and carry only the cash or credit cards that you will need on each outing. Stay alert to pickpockets when in crowds and when taking public transportation, and be conscious that distractions can be created to target you.

## **CREDIT CARD FRAUD**

Increasing numbers of people have fallen victim to fraud related to their credit or debit cards. "Skimming," the theft of credit card information during an otherwise legitimate transaction, is most likely to occur in restaurants or bars, where the skimmer takes the victim's card out of the owner's view. To avoid skimming, take the credit/debit card to the register yourself and never let the card out of your sight. Also, be sure to monitor your bank account or credit card statement frequently.

# SEISMIC ACTIVITY AND SOME TIPS TO BE CONSIDERED IN THE EVENT OF AN EARTHQUAKE

After years of relative seismic calm, Ecuador was hit by a tremor of 7.8 magnitude in the Richter scale, on Saturday, April 16<sup>th</sup>, 2016.

As you may know, an earthquake cannot be predicted, but since Ecuador in general is prone to tremors, as are most countries or territories located along both Pacific coasts, it is advisable to be prepared for such contingencies.



The first graphic above illustrates some recommendations for before, during, and after an earthquake:

On this second graphic below, we can see the recommended articles for an emergency kit. To the RC suggestions, we would add all prescription medicine that you may be taking, and wet towelettes:

# MOCHILA DE EMERGENCIA ANTE DESASTRES



  
**Cruz Roja  
Ecuatoriana**

Also, we cannot emphasize enough the importance of following your host families' advice in general, and on safety issues in particular. Here are some important questions for you to ask:

- Does the family have an emergency plan in place, to be carried out in case of natural disasters?
- Where is a copy of the house keys left at night, in case that the family home must be evacuated?
- What are the emergency contacts (besides AFS Ecuador's emergency line) that you should always have at hand?

Finally, these are some recommendations to keep in mind, in terms of your contact with AFS Ecuador:

- Our 24/7 emergency line is (096) 177 7700.
- Our email address: [sebastian.rodriguez@afs.org](mailto:sebastian.rodriguez@afs.org)
- Since our main channel of communication with you will be email, please keep us up-to-date on any changes to your email address.



- Please share with us your local cell phone number, once you have it.
- Make sure that you have your local volunteer contact's email address and phone number(s) as well.
- Learn quickly the location of your volunteer contact's home and workplace. Please keep in mind that only an emergency merits trying to locate your volunteer contact at work.
- If you are in Quito, learn also how to get to our National Office on your own, both from your host home and from your school.
- Regardless of whether or not you live in Quito, keep us at the AFS Ecuador National Office properly informed of your travel plans, and let us know how we can reach you if you are going away for the weekend with your host family.
- DO NOT use any social network (Facebook, Twitter, etc) or messenger service (WhatsApp, Line, etc) to communicate with AFS volunteers or staff. Always use email or, if it is something extremely urgent, a phone call is best.

Of course, it is our hope that we will never have to deal with an emergency, a disaster, or any special circumstance related to your safety or security, but it's always good "to hope for the best, but be prepared for the worst".

## VOLCANIC ACTIVITY IN ECUADOR

Ecuador's spectacular landscape is the dramatic result of a tectonic process called *subduction*. Just off the coast of Ecuador, the Nazca plate beneath the Pacific Ocean is slowly colliding with and diving eastward under the South American continent, giving rise to the Andes, large earthquakes, and frequent volcanic activity. As the Nazca plate descends into the earth, molten material or magma is formed. Magma contains dissolved gas, is less dense than the rocks around it, and so it slowly ascends towards the Earth's surface. Where it pierces the surface producing explosive eruptions or lava flows, volcanoes are born. This explains the belt of volcanoes that coincides with the crest of the Andes.

Subduction has been active for many tens of millions of years and so the record of volcanism in Ecuador goes well back into geologic time. Volcanologists have identified at least 61 separate volcanic centers in the country (not including the Galapagos, an entirely different volcanic phenomenon), 31 of which have erupted within the last 15,000 years. According to local scientists, this represents the set of volcanoes most likely to be active in the future, even though only 8 of these volcanoes have been active since 1532. Eruptions since 1998 have demonstrated some of the effects of relatively small explosive episodes on communities and ecosystems, but these recent eruptions are only a taste of the impacts of even larger eruptions that are possible. In fact, catastrophic eruptions, like their brutal cousins catastrophic earthquakes, have been great modifiers entire communities and cultures throughout Ecuador's history.

The volcanoes of Ecuador are watched by a group of scientists at the Instituto Geofísico (IG) at the Escuela Politécnica Nacional in Quito. By law, this is the only official agency with the authority and responsibility to monitor, interpret, and communicate the potential hazards at Ecuador's volcanoes. Currently, the IG maintains seismic instruments (earthquake sensors) on 11 of the 31 potentially active volcanoes. Due to financial limitations, only 4 volcanoes (Guagua Pichincha, Cotopaxi, Tungurahua, and very soon Cayambe) have true networks that surround the volcano and allow accurate detection and location of the small earthquakes that can signal magma's rise to the surface. In addition, IG scientists periodically measure sulphur dioxide gas emissions, springwater chemistry, and ground deformation of selected volcanoes. In terms of volcano hazards, Latin America represents one of the most dangerous regions on the planet. In fact, according to the Smithsonian Institution, Spanish is spoken around more active volcanoes than all other languages on Earth. Recent eruptions in Ecuador have demonstrated some of the many phenomena associated with volcanic eruptions that can injure or kill and damage communities, infrastructure, and ecosystems.

A primary concern in Ecuador due to the ice-capped volcanoes and the abundance of rain are *lahars* or mudflows. These occur when volcanic debris melts or mixes with snow, ice, or water and produces a cement-like slurry of ash, rocks, and water that can race down valleys at speeds

of more than 40 km per hour, devastating everything in its path. Even a non-volcanic avalanche or a small eruption can produce these mudflows. Any community located on the flanks of or downstream from a volcano should be aware of this hazard.

Explosive eruptions and sudden volcanic landslides can also produce hurricanes of hot ash, rocks, and gasses known as pyroclastic flows or surges that move at high velocities away from the vent. In human history, these have been some of the most deadly of volcanic phenomena. If the current eruption at Tungurahua were to intensify, the community of Banos is at risk from a sudden pyroclastic flow that could reach the city in minutes. Ash fall can be dangerous during large eruptions when roof carrying capacity can be exceeded and extended exposure to ash can have harmful effects, however for the most part, ash fall is a nuisance and not a deadly hazard. Ash clouds above volcanoes can reach many tens of thousand of feet in the atmosphere and travel for thousands of kilometers, where they pose a grave hazard to aircraft that may accidentally encounter the ash. Lava flows occur during many eruptions and can have dangerous associated phenomena, however usually they move slowly enough to allow time for evacuation. Volcanic gas can be of concern near a volcano or, possibly, in deep volcanic lakes where carbon dioxide can accumulate and prompt sudden releases of this potentially deadly gas; as far as IG scientists know, Ecuador's volcanic lakes Cuicocha and Quilotoa are not prone to such carbon dioxide hazards.

## **ASH FALL – THE MOST LIKELY VOLCANIC PROBLEM YOU WILL FACE WHILE IN ECUADOR**

Unless you live on the flank or at the very base of the volcano or in a valley that drains the volcano, the most likely direct impact of future eruptions will be *ash fall*. Ash is pulverized rock, crystal, and silica-rich volcanic glass fragments less than 2 mm across. It is abrasive, heavy and slippery when wet, and the very small particles (less than 10 microns across) can be harmful to breathe, especially for those with respiratory problems such as asthma. Sulfur-bearing gasses associated with ash clouds and ash fall may be irritating but are usually not harmful except for those with severe illness already or if exposure is prolonged. Ash is very rarely toxic and it is not likely to contaminate water supplies in small quantities; only a few eruptions in the world have produced ash with adsorbed fluorine that can be harmful, and none of these have been in Ecuador. Quito analytical labs have the ability to determine the composition of ash quite quickly to evaluate any toxicity. During an ash fall, people should stay indoors and consider taping windows and gaps to reduce infiltration. Protect your electronics from the fine ash, keep animals under cover, and if you must be outside use good goggles and a mask to help filter the ash. Wash off the ash before consuming food that has been dusted. Avoid driving which can be dangerous in the reduced visibility. When cleaning ash, especially from roofs and gutters, be careful: fatalities and injuries during an otherwise benign ash fall often occur during roof cleaning! Be prepared to be self-sufficient for days if services are interrupted (power, water, gas, transportation, telephone, etc.) Stockpile sufficient food, water, candles, games, battery-powered radios, and other emergency materials for prolonged isolation if the ash fall is especially heavy.

### **What To Do Before an Ashfall**

Whether in a car, at home or at school or work, you should always be prepared. Intermittent ashfall and resuspension of ash on the ground may continue for years. Keep these items in your home in case of any natural hazards emergency:

- Extra dust masks.
- Enough non-perishable food for at least three days.
- Enough drinking water for at least three days (one gallon per person per day).
- Plastic wrap (to keep ash out of electronics).
- First aid kit and regular medications.
- Battery-operated radio with extra batteries.
- Lanterns or flashlights with extra batteries.
- Extra blankets and warm clothing.
- Cleaning supplies (broom, vacuum, shovels, etc.).

- Small amount of extra cash (ATM machines may not be working).

### **What To Do in Case of an Ashfall**

- Know in advance what to expect and how to deal with it; that will make it manageable.
- In ashy areas, use dust masks and eye protection. If you don't have a dust mask, use a wet handkerchief.
- As much as possible, keep ash out of buildings, machinery, air and water supplies, downspouts, stormdrains, etc.
- Stay indoors to minimize exposure, especially if you have respiratory ailments.
- Do not tie up the phone line with non-emergency calls.
- Use your radio for information on the ashfall.

### **What To Do During and After an Ashfall**

- Stay in your home with your host family
- Close doors, windows and dampers. Place damp towels at door thresholds and other draft sources; tape drafty windows.  
Dampen ash in yard and streets to reduce resuspension.
- Put stoppers in the tops of your drainpipes (at the gutters).
- Protect dust sensitive electronics.
- Since most roofs cannot support more than four inches of wet ash, keep roofs free of thick accumulation. Once ashfall stops, sweep or shovel ash from roofs and gutters. Wear your dust mask and use precaution on ladders and roofs.
- Remove outdoor clothing before entering a building. Brush, shake and pre-soak ashy clothing before washing.
- If there is ash in your water, let it settle and then use the clear water. In rare cases where there is a lot of ash in the water supply, do not use your dishwasher or washing machine.
- You may eat vegetables from the garden, but wash them first.
- Dust often using vacuum attachments rather than dust cloths, which may become abrasive.
- Use battery operated radio to receive information.
- Follow school's directions or recommendations from your work site.
- Make sure livestock have clean food and water.
- Discourage active play in dusty settings.

### **What to Do during Cleanup Period**

- Remove as much ash as you can from frequently used areas. Clean from the top down. Wear a dust mask.
- Prior to sweeping, dampen ash to ease removal. Be careful to not wash ash into drainpipes, sewers, storm drains, etc.
- Use water sparingly. Widespread use of water for clean up may deplete public water supply.
- Maintain protection for dust-sensitive items (e.g., computers, machinery) until the environment is really ash-free.
- Wet ash can be slippery. Use caution when climbing on ladders and roofs.

Please remember disasters can happen anytime and anywhere. And when disaster strikes, you may not have much time to respond. After a disaster, local officials and relief workers will be on the scene, but they cannot reach everyone immediately. You could get help in hours, or it may take days. You may need them if your family is confined at home. Place the supplies you would most likely need for an evacuation in an easy-to-carry container. There are three basics you should stock for your home: water, food, and first aid supplies. In addition, you should stock clothing and bedding, tools and emergency supplies.

# UNCOMFORTABLE SOCIAL SITUATIONS

## **Laws, illegal Drugs, alcohol abuse**

All participants are forbidden to use, or become involved with, illegal drugs and substances. Explicit violation of this rule is cause for dismissal from the program and immediate return to the home country. It is most important that you remember this rule should you find yourself in a situation where illegal substances are being used.

In general, knowing something about the culture is usually the best preparation for knowing how to handle uncomfortable social situations. It is also good for your host parents to meet your friends and to know with whom you spend your free time. If you are invited to go to a party or other event such as a rock concert or soccer game and are not sure if it is safe to go. AFS recommends that you find out a little about the party or event, where it is being held and who will be there.

Usually your host siblings, parents, friends, classmates or coworkers at the project can give you information about the event and the people expected to attend. Some host parents may also "forbid" participants to attend certain kinds of parties, soccer games, concerts, etc. Participants should consider their parents' advice, even if other people the participant knows will be there or if other exchange participants will be attending.

AFS participants are subject to the laws of their hosting country. Neither AFS nor the national government of the participants' home country has the power to protect the participant from punishment with respect to drugs, thefts and other legal offenses.

Abuse of alcoholic beverages could also be cause for dismissal from the program.

Many countries have a 'legal drinking age' and young people are not allowed to drink if they are below this age. In Ecuador there is such a legal age but there are no limitations in practice, so it is very common to find people under 18 years of age drinking, although it is not considered socially acceptable in all situations, especially by parents and other adults.

Unfortunately, alcohol abuse has become a major problem in our society. Some Ecuadorians may be very pushy in social occasions when alcohol is freely dispensed, so you may want to avoid having to face a potentially uncomfortable or unpleasant situation by saying from the beginning that you don't drink. This being a society with double standards in many areas, even adults who drink socially to the point of getting drunk will strongly object to their children acting likewise.

## **Sexual Harassment**

Cultures differ in their views of appropriate sexual behavior and practices between young people. Often clarification of attitudes may be necessary and here, again the advice of people you have come to know and trust is very valuable. Knowledge about the people you socialize with is important, and this is acquired best through increasing knowledge of the culture. Equally important are your own values and beliefs regarding your behavior. In societies where some young people are sexually active, there are also many that are not. You should not compromise your own personal values and beliefs regarding sexual behavior.

You may be unsure in some situations if you are being sexually harassed or if a particular person's behavior would be considered as normal or just friendly. An important source is your own instinct. Often your host siblings/parents and friends will be able to advise you about what is normal behavior regarding people you do not know. Other people to whom you can turn to for advice or help are the AFS contacts within your community or at the National Office.

Sexual harassment is likely to happen in any country. Females especially, although not exclusively, are subject to harassment. For example, if a guy or group of guys whistle at a female participant, she should avoid contact with them, she should ignore them and walk away. If a car pulls up on the curb alongside a female participant, she should carry on walking and not get in.

In a society that still holds on strongly to double standards of behavior, females may become an open target for sexual harassment by doing things that would not matter in other cultures, such as going into a bar alone or in the sole company of other females. Also remember that Ecuadorians may have preconceived ideas about females from some other countries --"all the girls from X country are easy", etc. It is also important for you to know that a "No" does not have the same value here as it may in other parts of the world. Unless you know the man well, and are sure of the degree of care and respect he has for you as a person, even a show of affection such as kissing may be interpreted as a definite prelude to sexual activity.

Young people might be subject to an assault (in crowded places). Try to avoid this by moving away from the person or by loudly yelling at the person to intimidate him. Also wear discreet clothing and do not go to isolated places with people that you don't know well.

If you realize that someone is following you, try to go into a public place (a bar, a shop, and a restaurant) and ask someone for help.

In the event of an actual assault, the participant should first notify the host parents and the AFS National Office.

Although not common, sexual advances may come from a member of the host family. If this is the case, please be very firm to stop these advances, and communicate **immediately** with our AFS Ecuador's emergency line, at (096) 177 7700, which is open 24/7.

## EMERGENCIES

The role of the military or of the police authorities may vary from country to country. Each country is different. In some, they may be helpful and respected, while in others they may not be of much help and will be seen mainly as repressive figures.

If the police or other authorities in uniform stop you for any reason, you should show respect and cooperate with them, even though you may be innocent of any crime and think that you are being treated unfairly.

In such a situation, it is unlikely that you will understand what is being said by the figure of authority. In general, the best advice would be to say that you do not understand what is happening and identify yourself as an exchange participant. As a foreigner you are obliged to carry a copy of your passport and visa at all times and it is also advisable to always carry your AFS identification card. This is important not only in the event of being questioned by authorities, but also in the unfortunate event of a personal accident or if you become a victim of a crime and may not be able to communicate effectively.

In the case of an emergency you should try to call your host family, the local contact person or the AFS National Office. Outside working hours (9:30 AM to 1:30 PM, and 2:30 PM to 6:30 PM from Monday through Friday) or during holidays, you can call our duty officer at mobile phone (096) 177 7700.

Should you need to become hospitalized, AFS Ecuador provides you with a medical credit card exclusively for that purpose. Your host family has been given an **Emergencies Manual**, which contains a full list of all the hospitals and clinics around the country where the card will be honored.

In case of a national emergency the participant should follow the advice of the government or the local authorities. The AFS National Office will immediately contact the participants in order to provide any necessary help. Please do not acknowledge rumors following a natural disaster or during a particularly difficult period of political unrest. Official information will come to you from our National Office through your AFS Local Coordinator, or directly to you via email. Also, the AFS National Office submits at the beginning of the program a list of the participants being hosted in Ecuador to their respective Embassies. You will also be asked to fill out any special forms that your Embassy may require registering their nationals living in Ecuador.

## CONCLUSION

The best general advice AFS can recommend regarding issues of personal safety is as follows:

- Get to know the host culture well through questions, dialogue and discussion with your host family, peers and the AFS local contacts. It is also important to observe their behavior and do as they do as much as possible.
- Take seriously any concerns expressed by your host family, school and AFS volunteers and/or staff, and follow their advice.
- As stated in the Participation Agreement document that you signed prior to leaving home, the AFS National Office will make recommendations and give guidelines for physical welfare and security. Take this advice seriously and comply with these guidelines.