

Newcomers - Questions and Answers

Introduction

For newcomer kids, school can be particularly tough. You might feel pulled in two directions, between your original culture and the new culture in Canada. Maybe you feel caught between kids at school and your parents. Perhaps you feel you have to choose between your original language, beliefs and customs, and those of your new country.

This guide is designed to help answer a few questions that you might have. It also offers people and places where you can find help and information, as you learn how you want to live in your new community.

Culture conflict

Parents worry. That's part of their job! They want what is best for you, but sometimes they worry too much. A lot of kids wonder how they can make their parents feel more comfortable.

Q: I feel like my parents worry that I am “too Canadian”. They think that I don't care about learning about my original language, or the beliefs and customs of our culture. What can I do?

A: Canada is a good place, and your parents know that. Otherwise, they wouldn't have brought your family to Canada. Your parents will be pleased that you are settling in so well. But it is important to remember where you came from. That is a big part of who you are.

One of the great things about Canada is that you don't have to lose your original culture to be a Canadian. You can have both! Knowing about the traditions that your parents value will make them feel better about the new traditions you are learning in Canada. Also, learning about the country you lived in before you came to Canada will make you a more interesting and complete person.

Your parents and stress

Q: I am worried about my parents. They worry all the time about jobs, and they never want to do anything with me. Is this ever going to get better?

A: It can be very difficult to adjust to life in a new country. It can be particularly hard for parents, especially if they need to learn another language. Getting used to Canada might take a long time. It might take years. There are no shortcuts, but it will get easier, and there are things that you can do to help.

Encourage your parents to do things with you. If you are playing in a basketball game, or acting in a play, ask them to come along. They will be pleased to see you doing something you enjoy.

Ask your parents to teach you something that they are good at. When you first come to Canada, people have to learn new things all the time – a new language, a new city, new foods and new weather. It is nice for them to do something that they are good at, and they will enjoy spending time with you.

Parents are sometimes reluctant to ask for help when they need it. It is important to talk to a trusted adult if you think that your parents need help. This can be really hard to do, but it's worth it. A trusted adult might be someone from your religious community, a relative, or a counsellor at your school.

Parent control and discipline

Q: My parents don't like my school friends, and lecture me about spending time with them. My parents think my friends are a bad influence on me. I disagree, but parents don't listen.

A: A lot of parents – not just newcomer parents – are concerned about their kid's friends. All families struggle with this challenge, and it can be a source of conflict in a family.

If you want your parents to be more comfortable about you spending time with your friends, introduce them to your parents. Sometimes, that's all it takes.

But what about if your parents have met your friends and there are still problems? You might be able to make a deal with your parents. For instance, your parents might agree to let you spend time with your friends before supper, but not in the evening. Or, maybe they will feel more comfortable if you bring an older brother or sister with you.

Sometimes, no matter what you do, your parents will not let you spend time with your friends. In that case, try talking to another adult you trust - a teacher, or a coach, or maybe your uncle or aunt. An adult might be able to help you talk to your parents. They might also help you discover that your parents are right, and you need to find new friends who are better for you.

Police and the Law

Q: In the country I came from, the police could arrest you at any time, for no reason. People would be put in jail without being accused of a crime. I never felt safe around the police. What is it like in Canada?

A: Canada is very different from the country you're talking about. Police officers are here to help and protect you, so you can ask them for help if you need it. If someone hurts or attacks you, if an accident happens, if you see a crime happening, if something you own has been stolen - these are all things the police can help you with. Police can be reached on the phone by calling 911, or you can press 0 on your phone and the operator will connect you with the police.

If the police do want to talk to you about a crime, remember that in Canada, you are always considered to be innocent of that crime until it has been proven in a law court that you are guilty. Answer any questions truthfully, and do not try to resist or run away. Never try to bribe a police officer, by offering money, favours, or anything else - in Canada, it's against the law.

If you are taken into custody (the police decide they want to keep you somewhere secure while they decide what should be done), remember that you have a right to know why you are being held, and that you can have a lawyer and translator if you need one. If you need a lawyer, you or your parents can hire one. If you can't afford a lawyer, you may be able to get legal aid, which means a lawyer will represent you for free.

Finally, Canada has laws that protect children and youth from being abused or harmed. The police, or anyone who works with children, will act if they think a child has been harmed or is in danger. There is also a Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which protects not only children and youth, but all Canadians.

There's more information available about the police, the law, and how they apply to you. The Government of Canada has written a guide for newcomers called "Welcome to Canada: What You Should Know". You can find a copy by searching for the title on Google, or you can read it by going to this web page:

<http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/resources/publications/welcome/wel-05e.asp>

The John Howard Society of Alberta has information on laws that apply to youth in Canada, including activities that you can do in class. You can find the information on this web page.

<http://johnhoward.ab.ca/teachers/online/ycja.html>

Feeling alone

Q: I am really lonely. How can I make friends?

A: 35,000 children move to Canada from other countries every year. Lots of them feel the same way you do. When you think about it, it's odd that there are so many kids who are probably feeling sad and lonely and want meet new friends. Unfortunately, knowing that you are not alone doesn't make it any easier to make friends. But it does mean that, in the same way that you are hoping to meet a new friend, they are hoping to meet you, too.

If you spend all of your time alone, you can be sure that you won't make any new friends, so an important step in making new friends is meeting people. There are lots of ways to meet other kids. You could join a club, or a team, or a program at school. That way, you will meet some kids who like the same sorts of things you do!

When you meet someone new, look at their eyes and smile. Remember that they are probably hoping to meet a new friend just as much as you are. Be friendly. Listen carefully when someone else is talking

- after all, you like it when someone listens to you. You will also find that it is easier to make friends if you are cheerful and confident. That can be hard, especially at first, but you can learn to do it. Share how you're feeling with the other person, because you may be relieved to find out they're feeling the same way!

Succeeding in school

Q: I am not a very good student. I am worried that I might be falling behind my classmates. What can I do?

A: If you aren't keeping up at school, it can seem like everything else in your life is going badly, too. You spend a lot of time at school, so if you aren't happy there, you won't be happy a lot of the time. And it can seem like everyone – your parents and teachers, and your friends – wants you to get good marks and do well.

When you are feeling frustrated with school, you might want to stop trying your best, but don't give up. Remember that, because everyone *wants* you to do well at school, it also means that you have a lot of people who want to *help* you.

Keep trying, even when you don't know the answers. It can be scary, but asking questions is a good way to make sure that you understand. If you ask one question in each class every day, you will learn at least one new thing every day.

Getting help with homework is another good way to make sure that you understand. Maybe you can get a group of friends together, and all of you can do your homework together. Being with friends makes homework a lot more fun! Your parents or older brothers and sisters can also help with homework.

You should also talk with your teacher if you feel like you are falling behind. Your teacher might be able to give you extra help, or give you a partner to work with. Your teacher might also give you a better idea of how you're doing - you might not be falling as far behind as you think!

Q: I have been in Canada for a year, and I still barely understand English. Am I stupid?

A: No, you are not stupid. English is one of the hardest languages to learn. It can be the toughest part of getting used to living in Canada.

Sometimes, people say that learning English is easy for kids. It might be frustrating to hear that, especially if you are a kid, but what they mean is that kids have a lot of time to learn. You go to school all day, and you might not even have a job, so to them it seems like you can spend all of your time learning English.

It might be a long time before you are comfortable speaking English, but even if it takes a few years, you'll still be young. While that might make you feel a bit better, it doesn't make learning English any easier.

See if you can find a "language buddy", a friend or an adult you trust who would be willing to help you with your English, and who would perhaps like to learn *your* first language. It might make learning more fun!

Many schools have extra help for kids who are having a hard time learning English. You might be embarrassed to be in one of these "extra help" classes, but remember that learning English can be difficult. Many of your classmates who learned English as their first language would probably need to go to an "extra help" class if they had to learn *your* first language!

Needing extra help doesn't mean you're not smart, but turning down the help you need might not be a smart thing to do.

Q: What are the different categories of immigrants?

A: There are three basic immigration categories for people who are going to stay in Canada permanently.

- **Family Class Category:** Immigrants in this class have been sponsored by close family members already living in Canada.
- **Independent Category:** Immigrants who qualify for certain types of jobs or have other important assets to bring to Canada can be approved to apply on their own.
- **Business Category:** Immigrants can apply to come to Canada to invest in approved projects or establish businesses in Canada.

Other people have come to Canada as refugees. Refugees are allowed to stay in Canada because the government has determined that it is unsafe for them to return to their own country. Refugees can apply for protection in Canada, or at a Canadian embassy overseas. Refugees might also be selected from a camp overseas.

There are other programs that can bring people to Canada, such as temporary foreign worker programs, and programs for students and visitors.

Weather and climate

Q: It seems like Canada has long winters. How does anyone enjoy living in place where it is always cold?

A: Canada is famous for being very cold. Some people call Canada "The Great White North" because of the snow and ice we get during winter. Maybe part of the reason Canadians love hockey is because it is a good fit for our climate.

In winter, it can be dangerous to go outside without proper clothing, including a warm hat, gloves or mittens, boots and a coat. If you are wearing proper clothes, you will find that playing outside is more comfortable and can even be a lot of fun.

Even though Canada has cold winters, it also has warm summers. In fact, summer can be very hot. Lots of Canadians wear open shoes, short pants and thin cotton T-shirts to help them feel more comfortable in the heat. If the country where you came from has a hot climate, you may be able to give your new friends some suggestions on how to deal with the heat!

Fears

Q: Before I came to Canada, some bad things happened to me. Everyone says that Canada is a safe country, but I still feel scared. I am trying my best, but I feel like I will never forget what happened. What can I do?

A: Some problems are too big to solve on your own. If frightening memories are making your life difficult, you need to talk to someone. There are doctors and other experts who are trained to help people deal with feelings about the past. Talking to one of these doctors can help you feel better. Ask an adult you trust to help you find one that is right for you.



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