

FAMILY-BASED CARE HANDBOOK

Introductory Guide

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This handbook is designed as an introductory resource to help you provide supportive family-based care.

It offers practical tips, real-life examples, and ways to foster resilience and strengthen family bonds.

Whether you're caring for loved ones at home or within your community, this guide is here to support you.

What's Inside

- Real-life examples
- Strengthening family bonds
- Community-based care
- At-home care

This handbook will provide a practical approach to family-based care, with insights to help improve well-being and offer support where it is needed.

Discover different care settings and the unique requirements that come with these.

With this foundational knowledge, you can confidently start or continue your family-based care journey.

Next Steps

We hope this handbook serves as a useful starting point.

For more in-depth information and advanced techniques, please refer to the full version of the Family-Based Care Handbook.

Family life is the first and most powerful “system” a child ever knows. Home is where children learn whether the world is safe or scary, whether they are loved or invisible, and whether they belong.

A family-based care approach starts from a simple belief: every child should grow up in a safe, stable, loving family, not in institutions, not in constant crisis, and not feeling alone in their own home.

This Intro Version of the **Family-Based Care Handbook** is designed for newcomer and immigrant families who want to build that kind of home, whether you are parenting your own children, caring for relatives, or supporting families in your community.

It shows you how to turn everyday moments into protection, healing, and connection.

What “Family-Based Care” Really Means

Family-based care is more than keeping children under the same roof. It means creating an environment where children are physically safe, emotionally secure, and deeply connected to family and culture. It includes:

- Safe, predictable routines.
- Warm, respectful relationships between adults and children.
- Clear boundaries and gentle, firm discipline.
- Support from extended family and community when times are hard.

Across the world, research and best-practice guidelines show that children do better in family care than in institutional settings like orphanages or long-term group homes. They are more likely to form healthy attachments, succeed in school, and grow into confident adults.

For immigrant and newcomer families, strong family-based care also acts as a shield. It reduces the risk of child welfare involvement, helps children handle discrimination or culture shock, and keeps cultural identity alive even in a new country.

Chapter 1

Building Safety and Stability at Home

The first responsibility of family-based care is safety. In Canada and many other countries, child protection laws expect parents to protect children from abuse and neglect and to provide basic needs, food, shelter, supervision, medical care, and schooling.

Practical ways to build safety and stability

- **Clear daily routines:** Regular times for waking, meals, school, homework, and bedtime help children feel secure and make it easier for adults to notice when something is wrong.
- **Safe environment:** Check that doors and windows lock, dangerous items (medicine, cleaning products, knives) are out of reach, and children know simple safety rules at home and outside.
- **Age-appropriate supervision:** Make a plan for who watches younger children and for how long, remembering that leaving children alone or in the care of very young siblings can be considered unsafe in Canadian standards.

Real life Scenario:

A newcomer mother working night shifts arranged for a trusted neighbor to check on her children every evening and for an older cousin to sleep over when she was at work. This small change turned a risky situation into a safer family plan.

Reflection question:

- What is one small change you can make this week to make your home safer or more predictable for your children?

Chapter 2

Strengthening Family Bonds

Strong bonds between children and caregivers act like emotional armor. When children feel loved, seen, and valued, they cope better with stress, bullying, racism, and change. Family-based care focuses on everyday practices that say, “You matter.”

Simple ways to strengthen bonds

- **One-on-one time:** Even 10–15 minutes a day of undistracted attention, reading, talking, or playing, can improve connection.
- **Listening first:** When children talk about school, friends, or worries, try to listen without interrupting or quickly judging. Ask, “What happened next?” and “How did you feel?”
- **Shared family traditions:** Keep or create rituals, family meals, prayers, songs, storytelling, or weekend walks. These traditions link children to their culture and to you.

Real-life example:

A family who recently moved to Canada began a weekly “story night” where grandparents shared stories from their village over video call. The children learned about their roots, and the family felt more united despite distance.

Reflection question:

- Which small daily or weekly tradition could you start (or restart) to bring your family closer?

Chapter 3

Fostering Resilience in Children

Resilience is the ability to recover from stress, setbacks, or trauma. Many immigrant and refugee children face big challenges, migration, language barriers, racism, and sometimes separation from loved ones. Family-based care seeks to turn these experiences into sources of strength, not lifelong wounds.

Key ingredients of resilience

- **Secure relationships:** Children who have at least one stable, caring adult are more likely to bounce back from adversity.
- **Healthy coping skills:** Teaching children to name their feelings, breathe deeply, ask for help, and problem-solve builds resilience.
- **Positive identity:** Helping children feel proud of their culture, language, and story gives them roots and confidence.

Real-life example:

A teenager struggling with racism at school started attending a cultural youth group where they could speak their first language and meet peers from similar backgrounds. With family support and community connection, their confidence and school performance improved.

Practical tips:

- Help your child name feelings: “You look upset. Are you feeling angry, sad, or worried?”
- Encourage problem-solving: “What are two possible solutions? Which one should we try first?”
- Celebrate cultural strengths: music, food, language, faith, and history.

Reflection question:

- When your child is upset, do you mostly correct their behaviour, or also help them understand and express their feelings?

Chapter 4

Gentle, Firm Discipline That Protects Children

In many cultures, strict discipline and physical punishment are seen as signs of love and responsibility. In Canada and other countries, physical punishment is increasingly discouraged and can lead to concern from schools or child welfare. Family-based care aims for discipline that teaches and protects, instead of frightening or harming.

Principles of family-based discipline

- **Separate the child from the behaviour:** “You are a good child, but this behaviour is not acceptable.”
- **Use consequences that are related and reasonable:** Loss of screen time for misusing devices, early bedtime after refusing to sleep.
- **Stay calm and consistent:** Children feel safer when rules and responses are predictable.

Real-life example:

Instead of hitting their child for talking back, a parent decided on a new rule: if the child used disrespectful words, they would need to take a 10-minute break and then come back to try again with respectful language. Over time, arguments became shorter and less explosive.

Practical alternatives to physical punishment:

- Time-outs or calm-down spaces.
- Loss of specific privileges (games, outings) for a short time.
- Extra responsibilities, like helping with chores.
- Calm, serious talks about the impact of behaviour.

Reflection question:

- Which form of discipline from your childhood do you want to keep, and which do you want to change for your children?

Chapter 5

Using Your Community as a Circle of Care

Family-based care does not mean doing everything alone. Best-practice guidance for working with immigrant families highlights the importance of extended family, faith communities, and cultural organizations as key supports. A strong “circle of care” reduces stress on parents and gives children more safe adults.

Ways to build a circle of care

- **Extended family:** Even from a distance, relatives can call children, share stories, and provide advice and emotional support.
- **Faith or cultural groups:** Many offer youth activities, mentorship, and practical help for families.
- **Local services:** Settlement agencies, community centres, and parenting programs can provide information and connection.

Real-life example:

A single father joined a local community centre’s parenting group where he met other newcomer parents. They began taking turns watching each other’s children during appointments, turning isolation into shared care.

Reflection question:

- Who are three people or groups you could include in your family’s “circle of care” over the next few months?

Chapter 6

When Things Get Hard: Asking for Help Early

Even strong families go through difficult seasons, job loss, illness, conflict, mental health struggles. Trauma-informed and family-focused practice encourages families to seek help early, before a crisis leads to involvement with child protection or police.

Signs you may need extra support

- Constant fighting or shouting at home.
- Children's behaviour changing suddenly, withdrawn, aggressive, or very anxious.
- Parents feeling numb, hopeless, or out of control.
- Safety concerns like self-harm, threats, or violence.

Sources of help can include family doctors, school counsellors, community health centres, mental health services, and trusted community leaders. Asking for help does not mean you are a bad parent; it shows courage and responsibility.

Real-life example:

A mother noticed her son was becoming aggressive and withdrawn after moving schools. Instead of waiting, she asked the school to connect her with a counsellor. Early support prevented the situation from escalating and helped the whole family adjust.

Reflection question:

- If you needed help tomorrow, do you know who you would contact first?

Conclusion

Your Home as a Healing Place

Family-based care is a journey, not a one-time project. Every small change, an extra moment of listening, a calmer response to misbehaviour, a new routine, a phone call to ask for help, moves your family toward greater safety and connection.

As an intro version, this handbook has given you:

- A clear picture of what family-based care looks like in everyday life.
- Real-life examples from families facing change, migration, and stress.
- Practical ideas for strengthening bonds and resilience at home.

Your love, your culture, and your willingness to learn are powerful. With the right information and support, your home can be a place where children feel safe, proud of who they are, and confident about their future.

If you would like to go deeper into family-based care, through coaching, workshops, or an advanced handbook, you can invite your community to take this next step with you.

Visit www.dzifahtamakloe.com for enquiries

My name is Deborah Dzifah Tamakloe. I am a Master of Social Work (MSW) professional who moved from Ghana to Canada with a single mission: to protect and empower our community.

I have seen too many good families struggle because they didn't know the "unwritten rules" of the Canadian system. My job is to bridge that gap.

I don't just understand the system, I know exactly how social workers think, what they look for, and the language they use in their reports. I take the complexity of Canadian child welfare and turn it into simple, actionable strategies for parents like you.

I am here to make sure your family stays together, stays safe, and stays proud of our heritage. You don't have to navigate this system alone.

