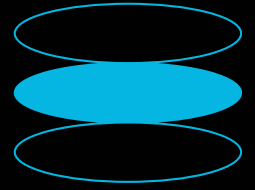




NAVIGATING CHILD WELFARE IN CANADA

Information for newcomer families



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Moving to Canada is a big, brave decision. This guide is designed to help newcomer families understand the Canadian child welfare system and avoid common pitfalls. You deserve that information.

What's Inside?

This guide covers important topics such as:

- Understanding Canadian child welfare laws
- Common misconceptions about parenting in Canada
- The role of cultural differences in child-rearing practices
- Navigating school and healthcare systems
- Building a strong support network
- Available resources for newcomer families

Next Steps

Read through this guide carefully, and don't hesitate to seek clarification from trusted sources or community organizations if you have any questions. Welcome to Canada!

Introduction – When “No One Told Us” Becomes a Crisis

Moving to Canada is a big, brave decision. You leave behind what is familiar and start again in a place that promises safety, opportunity, and a better future for your children. You hope they will be protected, educated, and free to become their best selves.

Very quickly, however, many newcomer parents realize that the “rules” for raising children here are different from what they grew up with. Friends, teachers, or agencies may say things like, “You can’t hit your kids here,” or “Child welfare will get involved.” You might have heard that physical punishment can cause problems, or that Canadian law limits the use of force with children.

Those messages are important, but they are not the whole story.

Many immigrant families end up on child welfare files even when they never hit their children. The concern is not always about bruises or visible harm. Very often, it is about patterns that are less obvious: children missing school, young siblings caring for each other, parents being isolated, language misunderstandings, or unsafe housing.

This guide exists because no one explains these hidden risks clearly. You deserve that information.

Beyond “Don’t Hit Your Kids”

Many newcomer parents receive one main message about Canada: “You are not allowed to hit your children.” This connects to Canadian laws and policies that increasingly discourage corporal punishment and encourage positive discipline. It is true that physical punishment can raise concern, especially if it leaves marks or is seen as harsh or humiliating.

But child welfare services do not only look for physical harm. Canadian child protection laws say that children must be protected from physical, emotional, and sexual abuse and from neglect. Neglect includes situations where a child’s basic needs for safety, supervision, health care, and education are not met, even if the parent never lays a hand on them.

When workers investigate a family, they look at the whole picture over time:

- Is the child going to school regularly?
- Is the child supervised according to their age?
- Is the home safe and stable?
- Does the parent respond to health needs and appointments?
- Is the parent overwhelmed, isolated, or struggling to cope?

If several areas show concern, the case may be rated “high risk” even without physical abuse.

Reflection:

- What did you think child welfare mostly cared about before reading this?
- Does it surprise you that neglect and lack of supervision can be as serious as physical punishment?

School Absenteeism – When Missing Class Becomes “Neglect”

In many countries, missing a few days of school, arriving late, or taking children out for family responsibilities is normal. In Canada, schools keep very detailed records of attendance. When a child is absent often, or when the parents do not respond to calls or letters, the school can see this as “educational neglect.”

Research and child advocacy reports show that chronic absenteeism, missing 10 percent or more of the school year, can trigger concern because it affects learning, social development, and long-term success. For children already facing settlement stress or language barriers, missing school adds another disadvantage.

How this looks in real life

- A child is late almost every day because the parent works nights and sleeps in.
- A child stays home often to help care for younger siblings or an ill relative.
- The family moves often; paperwork is lost, and no one is sure which school the child should attend.
- The school calls, emails, and sends notes, but the parent does not answer due to language barriers, fear, or embarrassment.

From the parent’s view, these may be temporary struggles. From the system’s view, they may signal that the child’s education and supervision are not being prioritized.

What you can do

- Keep track of absences and know the reasons.
- When your child is sick or must miss school, call or email the school the same day.

- If you need your child to help at home, speak with the school to find alternatives.
- Ask for an interpreter or settlement worker to join meetings so you can explain clearly.

Reflection:

- Has your child missed more than a few days of school this term? Why?
- Do you feel able to talk honestly with the school about your challenges?

Older Siblings Caring for Younger Ones – Supervision Standards

In many cultures, older children proudly take care of younger siblings. A 12- or 13-year-old cooking, cleaning, and watching little ones alone may be considered normal and even a sign of maturity.

In Canada, laws and policies about supervision vary by province, but many child welfare standards consider leaving young children home alone or in the care of a young sibling as “supervisory neglect” if something goes wrong. Authorities consider the age of the child, the length of time, the environment, and the child’s abilities.

Common scenarios that raise concern

- A 10-year-old walks a younger sibling home and stays alone with them for hours.
- Children are home late at night while parents work, with no nearby adult to check in.
- A neighbor hears crying or sees children outside alone and calls child protection.

Research on supervisory neglect shows that lack of adequate supervision is linked with injuries, accidents, and child welfare involvement. Even if nothing bad happens, workers may see regular unsupervised time as unacceptable risk.

What you can do

- Find out the recommended ages for leaving children alone in your province (many suggest under 10–12 should not be left alone).
- Arrange for a trusted adult, relative, or community member to check in if you must work late.
- Teach older children what they can and cannot do when watching younger ones, but remember that they should not be the main

caregiver for long periods.

Reflection:

- Are your children ever home alone? For how long and at what ages?
- Who could help you with supervision if your schedule is difficult?

Social Isolation – When “No Support” Becomes a Risk Factor

Starting over in a new country often means losing your natural support system, grandparents, aunties, neighbors, community elders. Many newcomer families feel very alone. Canadian research on immigrant families involved with child welfare shows that isolation, discrimination, and lack of support are common themes.

From a child welfare perspective, families with no support are at higher risk because:

- There is no one to step in if a parent becomes sick or overwhelmed.
- Stress, depression, or conflict can grow without anyone noticing.
- Children may have no safe adult to talk to outside the home.

Workers are encouraged to consider social supports as part of assessing risk and safety. A family with strong community ties may be seen as safer than a similar family who is completely alone.

What you can do

- Connect with settlement agencies, cultural associations, faith communities, or parent groups.
- Identify at least two trustworthy adults you could call in an emergency.
- Allow safe, supportive people to be part of your children’s lives; this shows child welfare that you have a network.

Reflection:

- If you were suddenly sick tonight, who could help with your children?
- Where do you feel most accepted and understood in Canada right now?

Language Barriers – How Misunderstandings Become “Non-Cooperation”

Language differences are one of the most painful parts of settlement. Many parents attend meetings where they understand only part of what is said, feel rushed, and sign documents they do not fully grasp.

Guides for assessing child maltreatment in immigrant families warn professionals that language barriers can easily be mistaken for non-cooperation or disinterest. When parents miss appointments, fail to return calls, or nod without asking questions, some workers may think they “do not care” or are “hiding something.”

Common misunderstandings

- A parent receives multiple letters from school in English and cannot read them; the school feels ignored.
- A child interprets for their parent and, out of fear or shame, does not translate everything accurately.
- A worker explains a safety plan quickly; the parent nods but later does something different because they did not fully understand.

Over time, these misunderstandings can build a picture of a parent who is “non-compliant,” which increases the chance of ongoing child welfare involvement.

What you can do

- Always ask for a professional interpreter if you are not fully comfortable in English or French. This is your right in many services.
- Repeat back what you heard in your own words: “So, you are saying I must... Is that correct?”
- Ask for written information in plain language and take notes.
- Bring a trusted support person to important meetings.

Reflection:

- Have you ever agreed to something involving your children that you did not fully understand?
- What would make communication easier for you?

Housing and Stability – When Your Home Tells a Story

Finding safe, affordable housing is one of the biggest challenges for newcomer families. Overcrowding, unsafe buildings, and frequent moves are often consequences of poverty and discrimination, not lack of care.

Still, child welfare workers are instructed to consider whether a child's living environment is safe and stable, looking at issues like exposure to violence, serious hazards, or chronic instability. Reports have noted cases where poor housing conditions, combined with other concerns, led to child welfare involvement.

Potential red flags

- Broken windows, doors that do not lock, exposed wires, or severe mold.
- Children sleeping in unsafe arrangements because of overcrowding.
- Moving many times in a short period, leading to lost school and health records.
- Frequent visits from police due to building violence or neighbor conflict.

Child welfare should not punish families for being poor, but when safety concerns are not addressed or when families appear unwilling to seek help, risk ratings can increase.

What you can do

- Document serious problems (photos, letters to landlords).
- Ask settlement agencies, legal clinics, or tenant organizations for support.

- Inform the school and healthcare providers when you move so your child's records are updated.
- If a worker visits, calmly show how you are trying to address safety issues.

Reflection:

- Are there any safety concerns in your home that you worry a worker might judge?
- Who could support you in requesting repairs or finding better housing?

How Child Welfare Sees the Whole Picture

Canadian child protection laws require workers to protect children from harm and risk of harm, using standards set by each province or territory. Decision tools and safety assessments typically ask about multiple domains: physical safety, supervision, health, emotional well-being, school, and caregiver capacity.

For newcomer families, research shows that these tools can sometimes miss cultural context and the impact of migration, racism, and poverty. Certain groups may end up over-represented in the system not because they are worse parents, but because they face more scrutiny, misunderstanding, and stress.

When workers evaluate your family, they often ask:

- Are the child's basic needs consistently met?
- Is the parent able and willing to follow through on safety plans?
- Are there protective factors—community support, extended family, stable routines?
- Are there compounding risks—substance use, violence, mental health issues, serious isolation?

Understanding how they think does not mean agreeing with every decision. It does mean you can better predict what might worry them and what might reassure them.

Reflection:

- Looking at all the sections in this guide, which two areas feel strongest for your family?
- Which one or two areas feel most fragile or risky right now?

Moving From Fear to a Family Plan

If you see your family in some of these pages, you are not alone. Many immigrant and newcomer parents in Canada live under the silent fear of “What if child welfare knocks on my door?” even while doing their very best. That constant fear can damage your mental health, your sleep, and your relationship with your children.

The goal of this guide is not to scare you. It is to give you the information that many families never receive, until it is too late.

You deserve to:

- Understand how the system thinks.
- Learn how to adjust routines without losing your culture.
- Ask for help early, before a crisis.
- Raise your children with confidence, not constant fear.

When You Need More Than a Guide

Reading is a powerful first step, but some families need more personal support. Every family's story is different: your immigration path, your housing, your children's needs, your stress level, your cultural practices.

That is why there is a next step if you want it.

If any of these patterns sound familiar, apply for my 4-week Family Stabilization Coaching program.

In this 4-week program, we will:

1. Map Your Current Risks and Strengths

- We look at school, supervision, housing, support, and communication together.
- You get a clear picture of where you are vulnerable and where you are strong.

2. Create a Simple Family Safety and Stability Plan

- Practical changes you can make in the next 30-90 days.
- Clear routines for school, supervision, and communication with services.

3. Practice Calm, Confident Communication

- Scripts to use with teachers, social workers, and other professionals.
- Role-play so you feel prepared, not frozen, in important meetings.

4. Protect Your Culture While Meeting Canadian Standards

- We explore how to keep your values and traditions while adjusting to Canadian laws and expectations.
- You leave with strategies that feel true to who you are, not like copying someone else's parenting style.

If you are ready to move from quiet fear to informed action:

➡ Apply here for the Family Stabilization Coaching program:

[www.dzifahtamakloe.com]

Your love for your children brought you to a new country. With the right information and support, that love can keep them safe, secure, and at home, with you.

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.

