

Raising Children Under Two Systems

A survival playbook for newcomer parents in Canada

The "Dual-Lens" Guide to Balancing West African Values with Canadian Law

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Canadian Legal System

- Focus on individual rights and autonomy
- Child protection laws
- Educational standards and expectations
- Healthcare access and guidelines
- Emphasis on gender equality

Bridging the Gap: Understanding Key Differences

Navigating the differences between African cultural norms and Canadian laws can be challenging for newcomer parents. This guide provides practical advice and strategies to help you balance your values with the legal requirements in Canada.

Key Topics Covered

- **Discipline:** Understanding Canadian laws regarding child discipline.
- **Education:** Navigating the Canadian school system.
- **Healthcare:** Accessing healthcare services for your children.
- **Child Protection:** Understanding child protection laws and reporting obligations.
- **Cultural Integration:** Balancing cultural values with Canadian society.

Next Steps

This guide is designed to empower you with the knowledge and resources needed to raise happy, healthy, and well-adjusted children in Canada. Embrace the opportunities, learn from the challenges,

and remember that you are not alone. Seek community support and stay informed about your rights and responsibilities as parents in Canada.

INTRODUCTION

The Tragedy of the Disconnect

Welcome. If you are reading this, you are a parent who cares deeply about your child's future. You moved to Canada to provide opportunity, but you may have realized that the "Village" you relied on back home has been replaced by a "System."

Growing up in an orphanage and migrating from Ghana to Canada gave me a unique "dual-lens." I understand that in our culture, discipline is an act of love to prevent a child from losing their way.

In Canada, however, that same act is often viewed through a clinical and legal lens as "abuse." This Playbook is your bridge. It is designed to help you navigate these two systems so you can keep your traditions alive while keeping the system out of your home.



THE LEGAL LANDSCAPE

How Canada Views Your Child

In Canada, the government operates under the "Best Interests of the Child" standard. This means the state can interfere if they believe a child's safety, even psychologically, is at risk.

The Reality of Mandatory Reporting

Unlike back home, where family matters stay in the family, Canadian professionals, teachers, doctors, and even soccer coaches, are legally required to report any suspicion of maltreatment. They do not need proof; they only need a "reasonable suspicion."

The Limits of Discipline

While Canadian law (Section 43) allows for "reasonable force," the window is incredibly narrow. It is critical to understand that hitting a child with an object like a belt or shoe, hitting a child's head, or leaving any visible mark is considered criminal assault. Any physical strike is often documented by the system as a failure of parenting.



THE "NEGLECT" TRAP

Household and Supervision

Many newcomer families are flagged for "neglect" simply because they are practicing communal parenting styles that don't fit Canadian urban rules.

The Supervision Standard

In the Village, older siblings are expected to watch the younger ones. In Canada, leaving a child under the age of 10 to 12 home alone, or in the care of a slightly older child, is frequently reported as a "Failure to Supervise."

Sleeping and Space

While co-sleeping or sharing rooms is a cultural norm for warmth and bonding, the Canadian system views this through a lens of "overcrowding." Generally, opposite-sex siblings are expected to have separate bedrooms by age five.

Food and Health

While your kitchen may be filled with traditional spices and foods, a social worker looks for standard staples like milk, bread, and fruit. It is important to ensure your fridge reflects a "stocked" status to avoid the label of "poverty-neglect."



SCENARIO - THE MISUNDERSTOOD MOMENT

The Case of the "Loud Conversation"

Imagine this: Amma is frustrated because her 8-year-old son, Kofi, didn't do his homework. She is speaking loudly, gesturing with her hands, and telling him he is "shaming the family." A neighbor hears the volume and calls the police.

When the Police and CPS arrive, they see Amma's "loudness" as a sign of being emotionally unstable. They see Kofi looking at the floor and assume he is terrified.

The Playbook Solution:

To de-escalate this, Amma must immediately lower her voice to a whisper. This demonstrates "emotional regulation" to the authorities. She should then explain: "In my culture, we speak with passion when we value education. Kofi looking down is how he shows me respect." Do not argue; instead, show that you are a loving home focused on the child's success.



IN THE THICK OF IT

Your Rights During an Investigation

If a social worker knocks on your door, you are in a legal process. You must move from being a parent to being an advocate.

Documentation is King

Start a Child Welfare Binder immediately. Keep every business card, record the time of every call, and save every letter. If you feel your "African passion" is being misinterpreted as "aggression," consciously keep your body language open and your voice calm.

Consent and Traditional Medicine

You do not have to sign a "Voluntary Service Agreement" on the spot. You have the right to request 24 hours to review any document with your advocate. Furthermore, if your child has marks from traditional medicine like cupping or herbal treatments, you must have your family doctor document these immediately so they are not mistaken for abuse.



THE SAFETY CHECKLIST

Is Your Home "System-Ready"?

Keep these standards in mind to protect your family from intervention:

Supervised Childcare: Ensure you have a vetted adult or licensed daycare for childcare.

The Kitchen Standard: Maintain a supply of standard staples (milk, eggs, fruit) alongside your traditional foods.

Emergency Safety Network: Identify two neighbors or friends who can act as "Safety Placements" if you are ever in a crisis.

Active School Presence: Attend Parent-Teacher interviews consistently; high involvement is proof of a strong bond.

Health Documentation: Keep your child's vaccination records up to date.

Physical Safety: Ensure smoke detectors are working and there are no visible household hazards.

KEEP THIS ON YOUR FRIDGE. IF A WORKER OR OFFICIAL KNOCKS, THESE ARE YOUR LINE OF DEFENSE

THE ADVOCATE'S SECRET WEAPON

Becoming a Cultural Translator

To win in this system, you must learn to speak "Social Work." When a worker questions your parenting, do not simply say "I am the parent." Use the language they understand.

Tell them: "My goal is to ensure my child has the internal structure and discipline needed to succeed in a competitive society. I am open to learning Canadian strategies that align with my goal of raising a respectful, successful citizen." This simple shift in language transforms you from a "problem parent" into a "partner in safety."

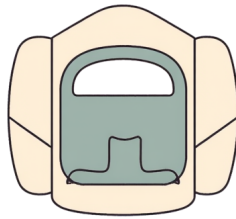


Don't Just Navigate the System, Master It.

The "Free Kit" gives you the rules, but a Strategy Session gives you the win.

The system can be intimidating, but you have a "Dual-Lens" partner on your side. Whether you are currently facing an investigation or you want to "system-proof" your family before a misunderstanding happens, I am here to help.

For any questions, visit www.dzifahtamakloe.com.



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.

