

# Talking Back to the System

Scripts and Strategies for Newcomer Parents

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Welcome to Canada! This guide is designed to help you, as newcomer parents, navigate the Canadian system and advocate for your children's well-being and cultural identity. We understand that communicating with schools and services can be challenging, especially when cultural differences or language barriers exist. This booklet provides practical scripts and strategies to help you communicate effectively, stay calm, and build confidence in protecting your children's rights and cultural heritage.

## Why This Guide?

- **Empowerment:** Gain confidence in communicating with schools and services.
- **Protection:** Advocate for your children's rights and cultural identity.
- **Clarity:** Use clear, effective scripts for common situations.
- **Support:** Access resources and strategies for staying calm and confident.

As newcomer parents, you play a vital role in your children's lives. This guide aims to bridge the gap between your cultural background and the Canadian system, providing you with the tools and knowledge to ensure your children's success and well-being. We believe in the importance of cultural respect and effective communication, and we are here to support you every step of the way.

## What's Inside?

This guide covers key areas, including:

- **Communicating with Schools:** Scripts for parent-teacher meetings, addressing concerns, and requesting accommodations.
- **Navigating Healthcare:** Tips for accessing healthcare services and advocating for your children's health needs.

- **Understanding Your Rights:** Information on your rights as parents and your children's rights within the Canadian system.
- **Staying Calm and Confident:** Strategies for managing stress, building confidence, and communicating assertively.
- **Cultural Sensitivity:** Insights into cultural differences and how to bridge communication gaps.

Remember, you are not alone. This guide is here to empower you with the knowledge and tools you need to advocate for your children and protect their cultural heritage in Canada. Let's work together to build a brighter future for your family!

## **Introduction – When You Don't Know What to Say**

Moving to Canada comes with many new systems: new schools, new health services, new rules, and new expectations for how parents should behave. Teachers encourage you to “email anytime.” Social workers say, “Let us know if you have questions.” Doctors ask, “Do you understand?”

But for many newcomer parents, the honest answer is: *No, I don't feel comfortable. No, I don't know what to say.* Past experiences with authority, language barriers, and cultural differences can make every meeting feel like a test you might fail.

This booklet is here to change that.

You will not find theory or complicated language. You will find:

- Real sentences you can use with teachers, social workers, police, and doctors.
- Short explanations of why each sentence works in the Canadian context.
- Small practice activities to help you feel more confident over time.

You are the expert on your child. These scripts simply help you express that expertise clearly and safely.

## Why Your Voice Matters

In many countries, questioning a teacher, doctor, or official can be seen as rude or even dangerous. You stay quiet, listen, and accept what is decided. In Canada, the opposite is often true: parents are expected to ask questions, share opinions, and join decision-making.

When parents stay silent, professionals may think:

- “They agree with the plan.”
- “They are not interested.”
- “They do not understand but are not saying anything.”

None of those may be true, but without your voice, people fill in the gaps themselves.

Using your voice does not mean being rude, shouting, or disrespecting your culture. It means:

- Asking for clear information.
- Explaining your reality.
- Saying what your child needs.
- Setting boundaries calmly.

The goal of this booklet is to make that kind of respectful, strong communication easier.

Reflection:

*Which systems make you most nervous to talk to, school, child welfare, health care, or police? Why?*

## Getting Calm Before You Speak

When you feel afraid, ashamed, or angry, it becomes harder to find the right words. Many newcomer parents carry trauma from war, poverty, racism, or past experiences with police or social services. Meetings can trigger memories and make your body go into “fight, flight, or freeze.”

Before scripts, you need simple tools to steady yourself.

Quick grounding tools

Use one or two of these right before a phone call or meeting:

- Breathe: Inhale through your nose for 4 counts, hold for 4, exhale for 4. Repeat 3–5 times.
- Write: On a small paper, write the top 2–3 things you want to say or ask. Keep it with you.
- Support: If possible, bring a trusted adult or interpreter so you are not alone.
- Pause phrase: Practise one sentence you can say when you feel overwhelmed:
  - “This is a lot of information. I need a moment, please.”

*Trauma- and violence-informed approaches encourage slowing down, giving clear information, and supporting people to feel safe and in control. You can ask for that safety for yourself.*

## Scripts for Teachers and Schools

Schools in Canada expect parents to be partners. They want to hear from you, but they may not understand your culture or your fears. These scripts can help you start the conversation.

- **Requesting a meeting**

*“Hello, I am [Name], [Child]’s parent. I would like a meeting to talk about how my child is doing and how we can support them together.”*

Why it works: It shows you care and see the teacher as a partner, which schools value.

*“English is not my first language. Can we please have an interpreter or someone who can help me understand everything clearly?”*

Why it works: It clearly asks for a support that many school systems are encouraged to provide for newcomer families.

- **Sharing your culture and expectations**

*“In our culture, we usually handle this situation like this: [short explanation]. I would like to explain that, so you understand where we are coming from.”*

*“I want to respect Canadian rules, and I also want to keep our culture. Can we talk about options that work for both?”*

Why they work: Research on working with newcomer families recommends inviting cultural sharing and finding joint solutions rather than assuming one “right” way.

- **Responding when the school has a concern**

*“Thank you for telling me this. I did not know this could be a problem here. Can you explain exactly what you are worried about and what*

*you need from us?"*

*"I want to work with you. Can we agree on 2-3 steps I can try at home and at school, and then meet again to see how it is going?"*

Why they work: These phrases show openness, ask for clarity, and create a follow, up plan, key elements of constructive school-home communication.

Role-play practice:

With a friend or partner, take turns being the teacher and the parent. Practise saying, "Can you explain exactly what you are worried about?" in a slow, calm voice.

## **Scripts for Child Welfare and Social Workers**

For many immigrant parents, child welfare is the most frightening system. You might worry that anything you say could be used against you or that your children could be taken away. These scripts are designed to protect your dignity while showing cooperation.

- **When a worker first contacts you**

*"I want to keep my children safe and I want to understand your concerns. Can you please tell me clearly what you are worried about?"*

*"This system is new to me. Can you explain what my rights and responsibilities are in this process?"*

Why they work: They communicate that you share the goal of safety and ask for clear information about the process, which trauma-informed practice encourages workers to provide.

- **Explaining discipline and culture**

*"In my culture, this is how parents usually discipline or teach children: [short explanation of how it is done in your culture]. I now understand some of this may not be okay here. Can we talk about safer options that still teach respect?"*

Why it works: It names culture, admits the possibility of change, and invites concrete guidance rather than hiding or defending.

## **Scripts for Child Welfare and Social Workers**

- **Asking for help instead of just being judged**

*“Our family is under a lot of stress with housing, work, and language. I want support to do better, not to be punished. What services can help us right now?”*

Why it works: Child welfare best-practice guidelines emphasize connecting immigrant families to supports, not only monitoring them. This sentence frames you as proactive and willing.

- **Slowing things down**

*“This is a lot of information. I need some time to think. Can you please write down the main points and next steps so I can review them?”*

*“I do not understand this part. Can you explain it again in simpler words or with an example?”*

Why they work: Asking for written notes and plain language helps reduce confusion and aligns with recommended communication practices with families under stress.

Role-play practice:

Stand in front of a mirror and practise saying, “I want to keep my children safe and I want to understand your concerns,” until it feels natural in your mouth.

## **Scripts for Health Professionals and Hospitals**

Doctors, nurses, and mental health workers often play a key role in children's lives. Misunderstandings in health settings can lead to unnecessary child welfare reports, especially when injuries, developmental concerns, or mental health issues are involved.

- **Sharing worries about your child**

*"I am worried about my child because I see [behaviour]. Is this normal, or should we do something?"*

*"We have tried [home strategies]. What other options do you recommend?"*

Why they work: They show you are attentive and open to professional guidance, which reduces assumptions of neglect.

- **Making sure you understand instructions**

*"I want to make sure I understand. You said my child needs to take this medicine [how often] for [how long], and we must come back on [date]. Is that correct?"*

Why it works: Repeating information back is a recommended strategy for clear communication in health settings, especially when language and stress are involved.

- **Talking about traditional practices**

*"In our culture, we sometimes use traditional remedies. Are there any problems with using [remedy] together with this medicine?"*

Why it works: It respects your culture while inviting the doctor to look for any safety issues, which promotes trust.

- **If someone hints at calling child protection**

*"I hear that you are concerned about my child's safety. I want to cooperate and keep them safe. Can you tell me what you are worried about and what I can do differently starting today?"*

Why it works: It acknowledges their role protecting children but immediately asks for clear information and concrete steps to change.

Role-play practice:

Practise saying, "Can you please explain what you are worried about and what I can do differently?" with a friend until you can say it even when stressed.

## **Scripts for Police or Crisis Situations**

Contact with police is rare for most families, but when it happens, it can be extremely stressful. Newcomer families may carry fear from past experiences with police in their country of origin. These scripts focus on safety and de-escalation.

- **When police arrive**

“We want to cooperate and we want to stay calm. English is not my first language. Please speak slowly and clearly.”

“My children are scared. Can we move them to another room or have someone comfort them while we talk?”

Why they work: They signal cooperation, request clear communication, and ask police to consider the children’s emotional safety, which aligns with child-centred practice.

- **If asked about discipline or conflict**

“I want to follow Canadian laws. If something I did is not allowed here, please explain clearly so I can change it.”

Why it works: It shows openness to change while not admitting to something you do not understand. You can later seek legal advice if needed.

Parents are reminded not to argue or become aggressive during police interactions and to seek legal support as soon as possible afterwards.

## **Making These Scripts Your Own**

Scripts are like training wheels on a tricycle, they help you start moving, but you will adapt them to your own style.

Steps to own scripts:

1. Translate key phrases into your strongest language if that makes you feel safe, then practise saying them in English or French as you are able.
2. Change words that feel unnatural, but keep the respectful, calm, and clear structure.
3. Write 3–5 “power sentences” you can remember in stressful moments, such as:
  - “I want to understand your concerns.”
  - “Can you explain that in simple language?”
  - “I want to keep my child safe and keep my culture.”

Practice idea:

Choose one script from each section and record yourself saying it on your phone. Listen back and notice your tone—does it sound scared, angry, or calm? Practise until it sounds steady and confident.

## Confident Conversations with the System

Reading scripts is a powerful start. Practising them, with guidance and support, is what turns them into real confidence.

Trauma-informed and culturally responsive programs emphasize the importance of safe spaces where families can rehearse difficult conversations, explore fears, and build skills together.

If you want support to move from reading to using these words in real life, there is a next step:

Practice these scripts with support.

Join my small-group “Confident Conversations with the System” coaching circle.

*Visit [www.dzifahtamakloe.com](http://www.dzifahtamakloe.com) for enquiries.*

My name is Deborah Difah 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.

