

Alone in Canada: 21 ways to make it better

A self-help guide for single newcomers



Centre
for Addiction and
Mental Health
Centre de
toxicomanie et
de santé mentale



Citizenship and
Immigration Canada

Citoyenneté et
Immigration Canada

Alone in Canada: 21 ways to make it better

A self-help guide for single newcomers

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Introduction

You are a recent immigrant to Canada. Perhaps you came seeking a new life, or to escape war or persecution in your homeland. You came here alone – with no close family or friends to help you. No matter why you came, you have to adjust to living in a society that is new and strange to you. Some days are good. Other days are bad. Sometimes you may wonder why you came at all. These feelings are normal. Over time, you will probably have more good days than bad, and you will begin to feel more comfortable and settled in your new home.

In this book you will find suggestions that may help you to get to the good days as quickly as possible. These “21 ways to make it better” share the experience of people just like you. Each chapter in this book begins with a quotation from a newcomer. Then, you will read about a problem that many people face when they are learning to live in a new culture. Each chapter ends with some tips or exercises that may help you to solve problems and to stay mentally and physically healthy.

You do not have to read the book all at once. Look at it when you are travelling or when you begin to feel lonely.

Chapter 1: Living in a new culture

“The first two weeks I was very excited. Everything was new. Then I found out that it was not easy to find a job. It was very difficult.”

Chatura, from Sri Lanka

Culture shock is the stress caused by living in a new culture. It is a normal part of adjusting, or getting used to new foods, language, customs, people and activities. Culture shock can affect the way you think, and the way you feel emotionally and physically. For example, you might feel irritable, sad or angry. You may feel that you cannot trust anyone, or that you are uncomfortable or homesick. You may have headaches or stomach aches and tire easily.

Many newcomers experience culture shock. There is not much you can do to avoid it, but there are ways to cope with it. The first thing is to recognize that you are going through culture shock, and know that it is nothing to be ashamed of. It is a normal reaction to the strangeness of everything around you.

As you adjust to living in Canada, your experience of culture shock will change. Culture shock runs in a cycle of several stages, which you may go through more than once. In time you will begin to feel more at home. Your experience of culture shock may include:

Excitement: When you first arrive, you may be excited about living in Canada and the adventures that lie ahead. Everything may look wonderful and perfect. You may be busy with finding a place to live, finding work and trying to make friends. This exciting period may last anywhere from a day to a few months. Sadly, it may fade away with time.

Anger and sadness: After you have been in Canada for a while, you may find that things are not as easy as you had hoped. You may have to wait for a work permit, wait for your refugee hearing or wait to enter English language classes. The education and skills that you gained in your home country may not have the same value here. When you are looking for work, you may be told that you lack "Canadian experience."

In this situation, it is natural to feel angry and frustrated. You may even wonder if coming to Canada was the right decision.

Speaking and hearing English all day may make you feel tired. Even if you are a native English speaker, you may have to concentrate to understand the Canadian accent. This can be tiring, as can having to repeat yourself several times for others to understand your accent. You may feel sad as you remember life, friends and family from your homeland.

Struggling to cope with everything, you may have less energy and tolerance than usual. You may have problems with eating and sleeping. It may be harder for you to be active or to spend time with people. It is important to remember that what you are experiencing is normal.

Feeling more settled: Eventually the anger and sadness will fade too. You will begin to feel more settled as you learn more about Canadian culture and as you get used to the food, the weather and the language. You will start to make sense of the things that puzzled or hurt you before.

Living with two cultures: It takes time to become comfortable in a new culture. It may be many years before you feel that you can call Canada home. You may find that while you are happy here, life is still challenging. In some situations there may still be conflict between the values of your original culture and the Canadian one. At times, you may wonder where you belong. This is normal too. Some people seem to adapt easily, but others take a long time to settle into a new place. Culture shock may fade quickly, or it may return again and again, but it does not last forever.

Exercise

Here is an exercise that may help you to understand your feelings on culture shock.

1. Which of the following do you feel most: excited, sad, angry or content in your new home in Canada?

2. What people, things or experiences have made you feel like an outsider in your new home?

3. What people, things or experiences have made you feel comfortable in your new home?

4. Is there anything you could do to make yourself feel better?

Chapter 2: Making friends

“It is very hard for me to stay here because my family and friends all are in my country. Here, I need to start a new life and choose new friends. It is not so easy for me to create that new life.”

Veronica, from Venezuela

Coming to Canada means leaving the familiar people and things from your homeland. These include your family and friends, and food, routine, and your place in the community. In Canada, you have to start over, make new friends and build a new life.

It is natural to feel angry, sad and confused as you build your Canadian life. There are no familiar faces or places to go to. It is not easy to make friends — Canadians always seem so busy. And when you do meet people, they may have ideas about your life or your country that are not accurate. It can all make you feel tired and frustrated.

Do not give up.

You can, and will, make new friends in Canada. It takes time. It is easiest to make friends with other newcomers, as you share the experience of living in a new culture. Farat, a refugee from Turkey said, “It was difficult to find friends

because of the language, but when I went to English school it was easier. I also met a lot of friends in the gym and when I engaged in volunteer work. Now I improve my English by practicing with my new friends.”

Also, remember that most of us made friends when we were young. Making friends when you are older is harder. Older people have more routines and are busy with work and family. Therefore, they have less time and energy to make new friends.

Tips

Here is a list of places where newcomers can meet new friends:

- ✓ English or French language classes
- ✓ at a church, mosque, temple, and other religious or spiritual places
- ✓ volunteer organizations
- ✓ at a sports club or in fitness classes at a community centre
- ✓ at the local library
- ✓ at the community centre, or at an immigrant settlement agency
- ✓ at a self-help group where people speak English or other languages. People in self-help groups meet to discuss common problems, and ways to try and solve them.

Chapter 3: Learning Canadian English

“At first many of us don’t speak good English. English is most important here because you have to communicate with people in English when you need something or have a problem. That is why for the past eleven months I have been taking English classes.”

Shao-Hui, from China

As a single immigrant, one of your first priorities is to learn English. Speaking the language opens up the society to you. Your level of English affects the jobs you can get and your ability to continue your education.

It is not easy to learn a new language. You can share your opinions and tell jokes in your native language, but in English, you may find it hard to tell people what you are thinking or feeling. This can be frustrating. You may become nervous about speaking to other people. You may be afraid that they will think that you are stupid.

It is a normal part of learning a new language to feel this way. It may help you to know that many people who were born in this country also make mistakes with their English. In time, you will become comfortable with English and you may even speak and write it more accurately than native speakers! Most

newcomers go to the Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) classes to learn English. Here, they are also very likely to make new friends.

You may be a newcomer whose first language is English. But you may speak it with an accent or in a dialect that is unlike Canadian English. You may find that a word or term that you use in your homeland has a different meaning here — different enough to cause confusion. This may make it harder for others to understand what you are saying, and for you to understand them. It can be frustrating.

Allow yourself to make mistakes as you learn English or as you get used to the Canadian accent. Most people understand that learning a new language takes practice. They will admire your effort. Try to accept or laugh at your mistakes and misunderstandings. Do not try to correct every mistake every time — be gentle with yourself.

Chapter 4: Helping yourself by helping others

“When you stay home and you have nothing to do, and you don’t have a plan, you begin to feel depressed. You feel like an animal in the zoo – just eating and doing nothing. That is why I took a volunteer job. It makes me feel better. Now I have something to do and I can plan my day and my week.”

Selina, from Colombia

Helping people in the community is a good way to feel better about yourself and your situation. By volunteering, you can share your time, skills or knowledge with others. Many people volunteer in Canada. Even though you will not be paid, you may meet people who can help you to find a job or make friends. Volunteering can give newcomers the “Canadian experience” employers look for when hiring new employees. You can use the agency where you volunteer as a reference when you look for paid work.

There is a variety of volunteer positions available. You can volunteer for an agency that helps people from your home country. This may help to lessen the stress of living in a new culture. Or you can volunteer with an agency that serves everyone in the community. In this case, you can use your English and share your culture with other people.

Make sure that your volunteer work is something that you enjoy. For example, if you like being with old people, you could volunteer to visit those in hospital, deliver meals to those living at home, or you could talk or read to those living in nursing homes.

Some people may volunteer every day while others can do so for only a few hours each month. Be realistic about how much time you want to spend volunteering and for how long. Community agencies looking for volunteers often advertise in the local newspaper. You can also find volunteer jobs by checking the directory of community services at the library or on the library's Web site. Or, you can directly call the place or agency where you are interested in volunteering.

Exercise

This exercise may help you to think about volunteer work.

1. List three reasons why you want to volunteer.

2. List three things you would like to do as a volunteer. For example, organizing events, helping children or cooking.

3. List three places where you would like to volunteer. For example, church, hospital or theatre.

4. List the types of people you would like to work with. For example, children, women or prisoners.

Chapter 5: Cooking and “potluck” meals

“I am single so I have to cook for myself. I am not used to doing this, so I feel very bitter. It is very hard.”

Mansoor, from Iran

Home cooking... You may miss the familiar smells and tastes of foods from home. Eating food that is unfamiliar and that you do not enjoy may add to the stress of living in a new culture. Some newcomers already know how to cook. Others may find that coming to Canada means learning how to cook for themselves. One Brazilian newcomer became closer to his mother when he called her every week to ask how to make his dinner!

Canada is a multi-cultural society. In medium and large cities you can find foods from all over the world. In small towns you may have to make a special trip to the nearest city to get what you want, or you may have to order over the Internet or telephone.

If you are not sure how to make something, ask your friends and family to send you some cookbooks or recipes from your homeland. Your local library may also have ethnic cookbooks in English and other languages. The Internet is also a great source of recipes.

Fast foods, like hamburgers and pizzas, and junk foods, like chips or nachos may be quick and easy, but home-cooked foods are better for your health. Eating healthy food can help you to feel better and make it easier to cope with the mental and physical strain of living in a new culture. You will also save money by cooking for yourself. Fast foods and junk foods are much more expensive.

Invite friends to your home to share a meal that you have cooked. Or ask them to come to a “potluck” meal. This is where everyone cooks and brings a dish with them. It is a fun way to get to know the food of other countries. Do not worry if your cooking is not perfect; practice will make it better.

Chapter 6: Writing for yourself and to friends and family

“It is a good idea to write to your friends in your country, telling them your feelings. At least they understand you because they know you. Usually I start to write one page and then it extends to 10 because there are so many things to write about. At times I feel I could write a book!”

Uche, from Nigeria

One newcomer found that writing letters helped her to feel less lonely in Canada. Another newcomer wrote letters – but never mailed them. He did not want to worry his family about the difficulties that he was experiencing here. But writing the letter made him feel better. Other newcomers joined Internet chat groups where they discussed tips on creating a life in a new land.

Some newcomers write journals. If you are going to try this, set aside time each day to write. It does not matter what you write or for how long. The important thing is to get started. Journals capture the richness of your life, the pain and the pleasure, the choices you make or are forced to make. As you think about what to write, you may notice that your feelings about your new life are changing. You may find that the writing helps you to discover solutions to some of your problems.

If you decide to keep a journal, start by buying a notebook that you will use only for this purpose. It does not have to be expensive. It is easiest to fit writing into your day if you set a routine. Some people write every day, at the same time every day, for example, early in the morning or right after dinner.

Exercise

To start your journal, you may choose and then complete one of these sentences:

- ✓ I came to Canada because...
- ✓ I am happiest when I am doing...
- ✓ When I think of home, the thing I miss most is...
- ✓ I am afraid of...
- ✓ By this time next year I want to...
- ✓ Last year I ...
- ✓ I like Canada because...
- ✓ I am proud of...
- ✓ Old friends like me because...
- ✓ New friends like me because...

Chapter 7: Celebrating the holidays

“The first New Year I was alone all day. I did not know anyone. You know what I did all day? I cried. This New Year was better. My friends and I had a party and we bought presents for each other. We talked a lot and ate a lot. We even danced. I still cried — but this time it was because I was happy.”

Chikako, from Japan

Plan ahead so that you do not spend religious and cultural holidays alone. In Canada, most people spend Christmas, New Year and Thanksgiving with their families or friends. Canadians who live alone or far away may make special trips to be with their families on these days.

Even if you do not celebrate these holidays, you may find it hard to be happy when people around you talk about the good times they hope to have with their families. You may feel even lonelier on these days.

You may also want to celebrate your own cultural or religious events, such as Ramadan, Diwali, or Chinese New Year. You can invite your friends over for a potluck dinner. Or you can meet them at a restaurant or café to celebrate.

If you cannot enjoy the holidays with friends, but still want to be with people, you can volunteer to help out in hospitals, homes for seniors or homeless

shelters. Here you will not be alone, and are likely to find people who will appreciate your company.

Chapter 8: Learning the unwritten rules of Canadian manners

“I was so embarrassed. I am blushing now just talking about it. I had never used a knife and fork in my life. In China we use chopsticks for everything. But, on the plane I had to use a knife and fork. I didn’t know how. Even now, I am uncomfortable eating with my Canadian friends. I am afraid they will laugh at my table manners.”

Zhang, from China

Every culture has rules on manners and good behaviour. Many of these are unwritten, as they are learned at an early age and are taken for granted by everyone. Coming to Canada means learning the Canadian rules about manners and behaviour. You will know when you have broken the rules by people’s negative reactions. You may find that your normal behaviour – for example, at meal times – is strange to Canadians. Or it could be the other way round. You may find that certain things that Canadians say and do are very rude!

Unwritten rules affect everything, including friendships, dating and dealing with co-workers and managers. When you come to Canada, there are few books you can turn to for help – you have to learn the Canadian rules through experience. This can add to your stress and confusion.

Wagner, a newcomer from Argentina noticed these unwritten rules: "You can never be late, you must always be on time. You must always look at your manager when you are talking to him. If you avoid his eyes he will think something is wrong. You must call an adult female a 'woman.' If you call her a 'girl' she may think you are insulting her."

When you feel that you have broken an unwritten rule, the first thing to do is to recognize that you have done so. Rather than feeling angry or embarrassed, ask the person about that rule and what they were expecting from you. It may help to laugh at yourself and the situation. This will reduce the tension. It is one more thing to learn as you adjust to life here.

Exercise

This exercise may help you to identify some unwritten rules.

List three situations where you felt you had broken an unwritten Canadian rule.

For each one, write what happened, how you felt and how you dealt with it.

Discuss these with a friend or with someone in your English class and try to identify the unwritten rule.

Situation 1:

Situation 2:

Situation 3:

Chapter 9: Building a new identity

“I was a lawyer back home and I had a good life. We lived in a large house, with servants to help with the children and the housework. I had my own Mercedes. Now in Canada we live in a bad apartment and I drive a second-hand car. The only work that I can get is as a counsellor in a women’s shelter. Nobody believes me when I tell them that I used to be a lawyer.” Esi, from Ghana

Immigration can give you a fresh start in life. This can be both positive and negative. On the positive side, there are parts of your identity that will stay with you no matter where you live in the world. On the negative side, many of the things that made you feel like a whole person are gone now and must be replaced by something else.

Successful newcomers find a middle ground between their old and their new identities. This takes time. It is important to hold on to the qualities that you value in your old identity, while opening yourself to challenges that will help you to form a new identity. This process may continue for the rest of your life.

As one newcomer said, “in my country there was no work and no hope for me. Here I am still struggling but I feel better about it. I am more confident

because I am safe. I am used to being alone now, and I like it. My family in Turkey doesn't understand this. They think that something is wrong."

Tulin, from Turkey

When you return to your homeland for a visit, you may find that you have changed, and may even feel uncomfortable. Back in Canada, you may feel lost as well. You are suspended between two worlds. This can be painful. It is also a normal part of adjusting to life in a new country.

Exercise

This exercise may help you to see the links between your old and your new identities.

1. Five things about me that I do not want to change, no matter where I live are:

2. Three things about me which have changed since coming to Canada are:

3. Three links between my old and new identities are:

Chapter 10: Finding a boyfriend or girlfriend

“The priorities are of course to learn English, better my education and to look to the future. Everybody needs money and a good job but emotionally, you need something too. My boyfriend is Canadian...”

Erica, from Venezuela

Most of us need some kind of intimate relationship in life. Some people may ignore these feelings until they feel settled in Canada. For others, waiting that long simply adds to their isolation and loneliness.

Coming to Canada may mean getting used to dating – something that you might not do in your homeland. You may find that dating is awkward and scary. For example, in Canada there is more equality between women and men than in some other countries or cultures. It is not unusual for a woman to ask a man to go on a date. On the date, it is all right if she pays for half the bill. These differences in culture and gender can add to the stress of trying to start a relationship. Do not give up. If the person is interested in developing a more intimate friendship with you, both of you will find ways to overcome the obstacles.

Here is another view from Galeb, a newcomer from Iraq. “On weekends I go to a bar. Most people there are Canadian. I am handsome, I put on good clothes,

and my English is fair. I can communicate. I find a girl and I dance with her. After some time something happens because I am an immigrant. People don't know my personality, other times they think that maybe I do not have a car and lots of money in my pocket. So the girls refuse to continue dancing with me. But eleven months ago I met a woman who is now my regular girlfriend. Many people don't have that."

You may find that there is more openness about sexuality in this country than in your homeland. There may also be more acceptance of same-sex relationships. Some newcomers find this difficult, as it goes against their cultural and religious values. Others find this openness feels welcoming and safer than the sexual standards they left behind.

Many people find that talking about sex is embarrassing. Some prefer not to talk about it all. But as your relationship develops, and before you become sexually intimate, it is important to discuss safe sex and using contraceptives. This way you can protect yourself and your partner from an unplanned pregnancy or sexually transmitted disease.

You also need to talk about what you expect from the relationship, and about what you can do to make sure that you enjoy your time together — both as friends and as lovers.

Exercise

1. How do you feel about the idea of dating in Canada compared to in your home country?

2. How did you meet your close friends back home?

3. Do you plan to find a girlfriend or boyfriend in Canada? How?

Chapter 11: Exercising for fun and health

“I run a lot. When I have a problem, I think about it as I run. When I am sad or happy I go for a run. I used to do that in my home country and I do it here too. I like running.”

Irina, from Russia

Staying healthy will make it easier for you to look good, feel good and be full of energy. If you do not take care of your body, eat healthy foods, exercise and get enough sleep, you may begin to feel tired and miserable. This may make it harder for you to cope with living in a new society.

Exercise is one of the best ways to make your mind and body feel good. Find a fun physical activity that can become part of your life. You may be able to continue playing a sport that you enjoyed in your former homeland. Many community centres and ethnic associations have sports activities and exercise rooms for people in the neighbourhood. You can also post a notice saying that you want to meet other people who are interested in your sport. You can put the notice in the library, community centre, supermarket or religious centre.

Walking is one of the best exercises — all you need are comfortable shoes and a destination. You can walk alone. Or you may find it more comfortable and

enjoyable to share your walk with a friend. When the weather is unpleasant, many people walk inside shopping malls.

Swimming is another good exercise. In many community and recreation centres swimming is free or costs very little.

Chapter 12: Coping with stress

“I prefer to stay in a small city like St. Catharines, because when I tried to live in Toronto I found it to be too stressful. If I stayed there I knew I would get depressed or sick. There were too many people and too many immigrants with problems. You need to be strong to live in the big city. St. Catharines is better for me. It is easier to make friends here than in Toronto.”

Vlad, from Romania

Stress is the physical, emotional and mental strain that you feel when life uses a lot of your energy. Everyone experiences stress as part of daily living.

Adapting to a new country and creating a new life for yourself can be very stressful. The stress can come from difficult tasks, like looking for work or learning English, and also from things that should be fun, like going out to meet people to make new friends.

You cannot avoid stress, but you can learn to manage it so that you are able to enjoy life and reduce the chance of becoming physically or mentally ill.

Perhaps you can continue the activities that helped you to feel calm and well when you were back in your homeland. Or you may need to explore new ways to reduce stress.

Here is another account of dealing with stress. “My life now has lots of stress, especially when I think about my two children. I feel sick when I think about them, as they are still back home. I can’t contact them by phone, since there is no phone. I try hard with immigration to bring my children here but the process is so long. Now you understand why I am stressed. I make myself feel better by looking at their photographs and the things that they draw. To take my mind off the problem I play my guitar and I sing. The music helps me feel better. Now that people know that I play well, they ask me to play for them. They appreciate that I can do something. I like it too. I am contributing to the community.”

Olivette, from the Democratic Republic of Congo

Tips on dealing with stress

Here are some ways that you can deal with stress.

1. Be flexible – know what you can change and what you cannot. Focus on the things you can control.
2. Laugh as much as you can – it releases tension. Tell some jokes, watch television or a funny film, or read the comics.
3. Breathe slowly – take a few minutes of your day to slow down and take in some deep breaths. This relaxes your mind and body.

4. Allow yourself to make mistakes — be gentle with yourself when you do so.
No one is perfect. Learn from your mistakes.
5. Face your problems — one at a time. It is easier to solve your problems if you divide them up, rather than try to deal with everything all at once.
6. Talk to someone — sharing a problem can make it seem more manageable.
Your friend, advisor or co-worker may be going through the same thing.
They may even be able to offer some advice.
7. Allow yourself to feel sad — change can bring a sense of loss for the way things used to be. This is true even when the change has improved your quality of life. Take the time to grieve the loss and to adjust to it slowly.
Grieving also releases tension.
8. Learn to say “no” to doing too much. This may be hard at first, but be realistic — you can’t do everything.
9. Get some fresh air — exercise and being outdoors can make your body and mind feel better.
10. Play more — having fun is a natural way to loosen stiff muscles. Try to have some fun with a friend, a child or a pet.

11. Read a book or magazine that you enjoy. It may take your mind off your problems for a few hours.

12. Meditation and yoga can help you to relax by quieting your mind. Also, yoga gently stretches your muscles.

Chapter 13: Thinking about the past, present and future together

“I have no time for the past. Why should I think about it when my husband was killed in the war? I force myself to think only about the future. Yet, sometimes it is not so easy.”

Kristinya, from Moldavia

Time may only move forward on the clock, but in our thoughts it can flow back and forth between the past, the present or the future. Some newcomers find it difficult to shift their focus from one period of time to another. They may get stuck thinking about the past and the life they had before coming to Canada. If you find yourself living in the past a lot, you may be getting depressed. You should consider getting help from a settlement worker, a religious leader or a doctor.

Other newcomers may refuse to think about the past at all. They may prefer to forget the experiences of war, refugee camps or the long journey to Canada. You may be one of these newcomers. It is natural for you to focus on the present. It may be the only way that you know how to survive. Even though you are now safe, you may find it hard to think about the future. In your homeland you may have felt that you could not think about the future, as you did not know whether you would live to see it.

Healthy people in ordinary circumstances constantly shift between the past, present and future. But when you have lived through stressful situations, keeping the past separate from the present and the future can be a healthy response. Eventually, as you build your life in Canada, you will have to link the past with your present and your future. This is not easy. It may take you months or years to do it. There is no rush. When the past is very painful, many people choose to ignore it – sometimes for years. When you think you are ready to deal with the past, you may want to ask a friend or a counsellor to help you.

Exercise

Try this exercise to see where your thoughts are most of the time: in the past, the present or the future.

1. Draw three circles representing the past, present and future. Vary the size of the circles to show what time period you think about most. The larger circle represents where your thoughts are most of the time.

2. Why do you think the most about the time period represented by the largest circle?

Chapter 14: Asking for help when things are not right

“At first, I did not know what was happening to me. I cried all day. I could not sleep. Nothing was going right. I was lucky, a woman at my mosque noticed that I was unhappy and she kept talking and talking to me. It was because of her that I went to see a social worker. The next time it happened, I knew what to do. I called a psychologist right away. Depression is very, very bad.”

Farida, from Syria

It is hard to be alone in a new country. Starting all over again is exciting, challenging and sometimes scary. At times it may feel like too much work. You may find it harder and harder to continue with your activities. You may begin to feel sad for days and even weeks at a time. You may begin to use alcohol or drugs to try and make the unhappy feelings go away.

If you find yourself feeling this way, you may be depressed. Being depressed affects your mood, your thinking, your level of energy, your appetite and your sleep. People who are depressed find it hard to do ordinary things and to be with other people. If you have seen or experienced violent or frightening events, you may find that these memories make it harder to enjoy life in Canada. You are in a safe country, yet you may be haunted by the past.

Feeling sad or frightened can be part of the normal reaction to living in a new country, or to surviving situations that threatened your life. But, if you continue to feel this way for more than a few weeks, it is a good idea to ask for help.

In Canada, people are not seen as weak or crazy when they ask for help to deal with their feelings. They are seen as sensible and aware that something is not right. Doctors, social workers, psychologists, counsellors and religious leaders help people who are having these kinds of problems. They can help you to cope with your situation, and to decide how and where to get help.

If you are thinking a lot about death, or feel that you want to kill yourself, go immediately to the emergency department of the nearest hospital. The staff there will help you.

Most cities also have telephone counsellors that you can talk to in an emergency. These services are open 24 hours, so that you can talk to someone any time of the day or night. These services are called Distress Centres and their telephone numbers are listed with other emergency numbers on page one of your local telephone directory.

Exercise

Read through the following list. Do any of them apply to you? If yes, have they been going on for more than a few weeks? If so, you probably need professional help.

1. Most of the time I feel restless and unable to sit still.
2. I drink or get high on drugs to deal with stress.
3. I feel tired all of the time, no matter how much I sleep.
4. I have missed days from school or work because of drinking or using drugs.
5. I find myself thinking a lot about death and suicide.
6. I am having problems concentrating, thinking, remembering or making decisions.
7. If I am honest with myself, I know that I am using too many drugs or too much alcohol.
8. I feel worthless or guilty most of the time.
9. Most of my friends are people that I drink or take drugs with.
10. I am anxious and worried about many things most of the time.
11. I am angry a lot of the time.
12. I depend on medication to get me through each day. I buy this at the pharmacy.

Chapter 15: Managing your money

“Making money in Canada is so hard! In Eritrea if you want to start a business, you just do it. Here you need money for this, for that, and for everything. A cup of coffee here is so expensive. If I think about the cost of the coffee in the money of my country, I would never drink it.”

Adam, from Eritrea

There are many expenses when you move to Canada. When you arrive, right away you have to pay rent and buy food and you may also have to buy winter clothes. You may find that things that you used to get for free or cheaply in your homeland cost a lot of money here.

If you cannot find a job or if you are waiting for a work permit, you may not have much money. In your homeland, you may have borrowed from friends and relatives when you were short of money. Here there may be no one you feel you can borrow from.

Sometimes you may not have enough money to buy food. Like some Canadians, you may have to use a food bank. Food banks are run by community agencies, and they provide free food for those who need it.

It is natural to feel angry and frustrated if this is your financial situation. It was not part of your vision of life in Canada.

To add to your financial worries, your family may be expecting you to send money to them. They may also wonder why it is taking you so long to save the money to sponsor them. They may not be aware of the cost of living in Canada. Your family may think that you are rich because you have heat in your home and cable for the television. They may find it hard to realize that these things are standard in Canada, and that they cost a lot of money.

What can you do to help yourself? You can start by setting a monthly budget. No matter how small your income, setting a budget will make you feel that you are in control. Next, you should set some realistic financial goals. For example, if you cannot afford to send money home every month, perhaps you can do so at the end of the year or on people's birthdays. Set a time limit for those expensive long distance calls home, or use phone cards that are cheaper. Save for your expenses. Even if you are only able to save a dollar a day, it soon adds up.

Chapter 16: Enjoying the weather

“I like the winter. I like looking at the snow; it is so clean. My country is too hot and I had problems coping with the heat. Here the seasons are lovely.”

Samator, from Somalia

Coming to Canada may mean getting used to the different seasons. Most newcomers love the spring and summer. The days are long and warm, the flowers are blooming, and everyone seems friendlier.

Winter may be the most difficult season because it is cold and sometimes dull and gray. You may be from a tropical country where it is warm all year, or from a place where the winters are mild. Nothing in your experience has prepared you for the Canadian winter. The further north you are, the colder it is. You may have to get used to wearing many layers of winter clothes. You may be afraid of slipping and falling on paths covered in ice and snow.

Other newcomers may enjoy the winter. They like the cooler temperatures and the chance to try new winter activities such as skiing and skating.

Some people may find that the long dark days of winter affect their health. The lack of sunlight makes them feel sad and depressed. If this happens to you, you can help yourself by using bright light when you are indoors – even in the

daytime. This mimics the effects of sunlight on your body and will make you feel better. It will also help if you go for a walk during the daylight hours.

Tips on dealing with winter

- ✓ Wear the right clothes – including socks, gloves and boots. Woollen or wool-blend fabrics are best as they are warmest.
- ✓ Always wear a hat – you lose heat most through your head. Wearing a hat helps to save this heat and therefore keeps you warm.
- ✓ Dress in layers you can add or remove if you get too hot or cold.
- ✓ Try a winter activity such as skiing and skating – you may enjoy it. Many recreation centres have programs to teach adults how to skate.
- ✓ Take a course at your local school, college or university – it may make the winter seem shorter.

Chapter 17: Setting personal goals

“I have two years to learn English and to get a job. I don’t care what kind of a job. I need the money to sponsor my two daughters here. Life in Canada will be better for them than in my country. They are still young.”

Luka, from Georgia

Setting goals can help you to stay motivated when you run into problems in your new life. A list of goals can remind you why you came to this country, what you hope to achieve here and when you expect to achieve each goal. Goals can help you to set the direction for your life and to track how well you are doing.

It is a good idea to think about your goals. You are more likely to achieve the goals if they are:

1. Specific – be clear about what it is you want to achieve.
2. Prioritized – you may have many goals, but you need to think about the most important ones. Put these at the top of your list and focus on them first.
3. Time limited – set deadlines for your main goals and the steps needed to achieve each goal. For example, “One, three or five years from now I want to....” Without the time limit, your goal may just be a daydream.

4. Measurable – think about how you will know when you have achieved your goal.
5. Important – your goal must be important to you. It must be so important that you are willing to put in the effort needed to achieve it.
6. Realistic – think about the obstacles that may prevent you from achieving your goal. Plan for ways that you can deal with these.
7. Rewarding – think about how you will reward yourself when you have achieved your goal.

Exercise

In the spaces below list some of your short-, medium- and long-term goals.

1. My short-term goals (for the next few weeks or months) are to:

If I achieve them, I will reward myself by:

2. My medium-term goals (a year from now) are to:

If I achieve them, I will reward myself by:

3. My long-term goals (three years from now) are to:

If I achieve them, I will reward myself by:

Chapter 18: Developing your routine

“I went to the coffee shop every afternoon – it got me out of the apartment. This helped me to cope with the long days, and it was better than watching TV all day. After I got a job, I worked 12 hours a day. I was always tired. But I still went to the coffee shop all day Saturday – it was my time to relax.”

Iqbal, from Pakistan

Having a daily routine helps you to make the best use of your time. If you are working or studying, your day is partially planned for you already.

If you are waiting for your immigration papers, or for language classes to begin, you need a reason to get up and get going in the morning. Spending the day at home waiting may only increase your frustration and loneliness. It's important to establish a routine that keeps you active and feeling as though you are a part of the world around you.

Here is how Olga, a newcomer from Bulgaria spent her time: “It is difficult to plan my days. So many things are out of my control that it is easier just to do nothing. I force myself to set a routine when the pressure of waiting is too much. I go for a walk first thing each morning. Then I watch the news for an hour. In the afternoons I go to the library. At least twice a week I go to see a movie, when it is half-priced. On Sundays I always go to church.”

As you plan your routine, be sure to spend most of your time doing the things that you value and enjoy, or that will help you to achieve your goals. Make sure that you include some relaxing activities and time for friends in your routine.

Tips

Here is how some newcomers learned to manage their free time:

- ✓ develop and follow a routine
- ✓ cut big tasks into smaller ones and deal with one small task one day at a time
- ✓ do some volunteer work
- ✓ set clear and realistic goals
- ✓ recognize that it is okay to be bored sometimes
- ✓ go to the library each day to read in English and other languages, to use the computer or just to relax
- ✓ go for a walk each day or join a sports team
- ✓ find a favourite café and spend an hour or two there each day.

Chapter 19: Coping with discrimination

“I like Canada because different cultures live together and I think that the way they get along is really cool.”

Gabriela, from Mexico

Most people in Canada are open minded and respectful of the various groups in this country. While this is true most of the time, there are times when this is not so. Some newcomers find that they have to cope with discrimination – not just from people who were born in Canada or who have been here for a long time, but also from other newcomers. The discrimination can be based on race or ethnic group, religion or sexual orientation. It is painful to experience discrimination. It is natural to be angry and very upset when it occurs.

You may feel discrimination most when you are looking for a place to live or for a job. Sometimes a landlord may tell you that a room or apartment is not available. You believe the person. Yet, you may find out a few days later that the place is still empty. You feel that the landlord did not like you. Or you may be sure that it was because of your race or religion.

Most newcomers have a hard time finding a job. Often they are told that they lack “Canadian experience.” Some newcomers have a harder time than others in getting work, even though they are just as skilled and educated. These

newcomers may find that employers don't hire them because of their race or colour.

Although Canada has laws against racism and other types of discrimination, the sad fact is that it still occurs. Sometimes the racism is so subtle that it can be hard to prove.

Many people experience discrimination in Canada, and you may experience it too.

What can you do when you know you are being discriminated against? The first thing is to recognize that it has happened. Then take a deep breath to calm yourself. You may feel frustrated, angry or hurt. These are natural reactions.

Once you have calmed down (if you can), decide what you want to do next. You probably have four choices. The first is that you can ignore the remark or the situation, and try to comfort yourself as best as you can. Second, you can complain about the discrimination to a friend or a member of your family. As a third option, you can confront the person who offended you. Finally, you can make an official complaint to the Human Rights Commission, to your managers, or through your union, if you belong to one.

It is important to know that you have these options, but choosing one is not easy. What you decide to do will depend on a number of factors. You will want to think about the situation and whether or not it's important enough to you to take action. What feels most natural to you? Think about the amount of support you can expect, and what the best outcome might be. And finally, you will want to find a balance between what is good for you, and fulfilling your responsibility to others, and to society.

For example, before you make an official complaint at work, you will want to consider how much the process is likely to upset you. Think about whether the managers are likely to be sympathetic or whether they will see you as a troublemaker. On the other hand, you will have to decide whether ignoring the situation will make it worse, not only for yourself but also for others who are likely to be discriminated against. It may help you to talk to a friend or to someone with experience in handling discrimination.

If you decide to confront a person that you feel is standing in your way because of your race or your colour, you will find it helpful to have the support of a sympathetic and knowledgeable group of people.

Chapter 20: Your own community

“Of course I stay close to my community! They understand me; they help me. I don’t have to keep explaining things to them.”

Dakola, from Tibet

Some newcomers prefer seeking help or services from members of their own ethnic group. It is more comfortable as you can speak your own language with someone who shares your cultural values. Or you may choose to go to the wider community for help where no one knows who you are and you have more privacy. Some newcomers are not sure they want to make links with their own ethnic group.

It is all right to have these feelings about your own community. Remember that even people from the same ethnic group may have very different ideas about life in Canada. Hindan, an Algerian woman found that here, her ethnic group was conservative. As she said, “they are so old-fashioned. They don’t realize how much things have changed back home. I find it impossible to talk to people who want to treat me like a “bad girl” because I am dating!”

Other newcomers may avoid their own community because they are ashamed. They worry that they have not made as much money in Canada as they would have liked. They are embarrassed that in their homeland everyone knew that they had a very good job. Here they may be forced to drive a taxi, work in a

factory or deliver food. If you are in this situation, it might help you to remember that other immigrants and refugees have had to work at jobs well below their ability in order to survive in Canada. The people that you are trying to avoid may be struggling just as hard as you are.

Within ethnic communities there are sometimes a variety of groups that differ in politics or religion, or other interests. Some groups within your community may be right for you, and others may not.

Other Canadians may not be aware of the diversity within your community. Therefore, even if you prefer not to participate in events in your community, it doesn't hurt to be aware of what is happening.

Chapter 21: Celebrating your achievements

“I like to eat. Each time something good happens, I eat with my friends. We know lots of cheap restaurants. Even better are the all-you-can-eat places and the ones that serve breakfasts all day.”

Antonio, from Angola

Celebrate the things that you have achieved in Canada. It could be that you found a volunteer job that you enjoy, or that you understood a joke in English the first time, or that your immigration hearing went well. These are all victories and proof that you are adjusting to life in a new culture. Celebrate them with your friends. Or treat yourself to something to honour the event.

Another way to celebrate is to remember your many skills and talents.

Immigration has not changed these. You may want to start a list all your skills. On the days that you are not feeling positive about yourself or about life in Canada, go through your file to remind yourself of the things you have to offer. Do the same when you are going for an interview; it will give you a boost.

To start your file, try this exercise. Ask three friends to write on a sheet of paper the things that they like about you. You may feel embarrassed about asking, but try it. You can then do the same exercise for your friends. You might discover hidden things that people appreciate about you.

Conclusion: Where to get help or more information

As a newcomer, you are probably experiencing one of the most exciting and difficult times in your life. We hope that the stories, tips and exercises in this book will help you as you build your new life here. Many newcomers have made Canada their home. It takes time, but perhaps one day you may be part of a group that helps other newcomers to settle down. We hope that this book helps you to feel that others understand what you are going through. We are glad that you came to join us here.

Welcome.

There are many places and organizations that can help you to adjust to life in Canada. You may first want to call or visit the immigrant and settlement organizations. These are specifically for newcomers, and have many services and resources that can help you.

Here is a list of organizations that are found in most communities. You can find their telephone numbers in your local telephone directory:

Telehealth Ontario - free health advice from a nurse. The service is open 24 hours, seven days a week. You can call them for free at 1-866-797-0000.

Library – books, CDs, videos, newspapers, magazines, access to computers and the Internet

Community recreation centres – fitness and sport activities, arts and crafts programs

Community information centres – general information on legal, social and education issues that affect the community

Community health centres – provide medical and counselling services

The book of community services – found in the library or on their Web site

Public health unit – health information in many languages; nurses who work in the community

YMCA or YWCA – sports and recreation activities; programs that help you find a job, train for a new career or start your own business

Web sites

www.settlement.org – general information on migration and settlement issues

www.ocasi.org – list of immigrant services in Ontario

www.charityvillage.com – database of jobs in community and social services

www.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca – government information on employment, also a database of jobs

www.camh.net – information on addiction and mental health

www.nimh.nih.gov – self-help information on depression

www.selfhelp.on.ca – guide to starting or joining a self-help group

For information on addiction and mental health issues, or a copy of this book, please contact the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health's 24-hour Information Line:

Ontario toll-free: 1-800-463-6273

Toronto: 416-595-6111

To order multiple copies, or other Centre resource materials, please contact:

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