

Adjusting to Family Life in Canada

The Allies in Action Project educates newcomers to Canada about domestic abuse/family violence and how to maintain healthy family relationships.

In Canada, it is the law that everyone has the right to life, liberty, and security.

What is family violence/abuse?

When someone uses abusive behaviour to control and/or harm a member of their family or someone with whom they have an intimate relationship.

- **Acculturation** is process of cultural change that happens when 2 or more cultural groups come into contact.

Gender Roles in Different Cultures

Each culture has different characteristics associated with being a woman or a man. For example, men who are strong can protect the family; women who are caring can raise children in the home.

In Canada, men and women are not always expected to have the traits that are traditionally associated with their gender. Men and women can experience different challenges to immigration. There are different gender role expectations, and changes in roles within the family.

Stress in acculturation can lead to abuse within families. When immigrant men have difficulty in the immigration and acculturation, they may respond by being overly aggressive and abusive.

Understanding each other through communication and listening

1. **Expressing your own feelings.** Let your partner know how you feel by using statements that begin with “I” not “you”.
Example: “I feel disappointed because...” instead of “You are always disappointing me!”
2. **Pay attention.** Set aside distractions.
Example: Turn off the TV. Show you are listening by nodding, saying “yes” or “uh huh”. Do not interrupt.
3. **Reach for feelings and reflect back feelings.** Show that you care about your partner’s feelings by saying things like “you seem really angry.”
4. **Avoid communication stoppers.** Try NOT to: give advice (“next time this happens, you should speak up to your colleagues!”), criticize (“you just need to get better at English”), or minimize (“it’s not a big problem, you have seen worse things”).

Problem Solving

1. **Define the problem.** (a) Each partner says how they see the problem, (b) define problem without blaming, and (c) be clear about why the problem is important.
2. **Think of possible solutions.** Think and write down ALL possible ideas even if they seem unreasonable at first.
3. **Make a decision and a plan together.** Choose the best idea that both partners are okay with.
4. **Re-negotiation.** After some time trying the new idea, talk about what worked, what did not work, and if needed, go back to idea list to try another idea.

Resources for Victim Safety

- **Leaving your partner**

If you have permanent resident status and you leave your partner, you won't be deported or have to leave Canada. If you have conditional permanent resident status or no permanent resident status or a refugee claimant and you leave your partner, get legal help right away by calling the Legal Aid immigration line at 1-888-601-6078 (no charge).

- **Calling the police**

9-1-1 (Ask for an interpreter if you don't speak English)

- **Other resources**

If you need help right away, call VictimLink BC. They give help to victims of abuse in 110 languages. They can tell you where to find an emergency shelter (a safe house) or a transition house, a victim service program, or a referral for legal help. 1-800-563-0808 (no charge), www.victimlinkbc.ca.