

Chinese Immigrant Orientation Program

Module 6

The Canadian Way of Life

Objectives

This module will help you to understand about Canadian social values and legal standards.

Goals

You will learn about:

Family and the Law

Important Social Standards

Important Laws and

How to work with people in authority

Family life and family law

Many people in Canada find that it takes two incomes to raise a family, even though parents are having fewer children. Most mothers have a job outside the home, and in many families, both parents share the work of shopping, cooking, cleaning the house and looking after the children. Because divorce has become more common, there are many one-parent families in Canada. Most single parents who raise their children on a full-time basis are women. There are also same-sex couples with children.

Marriage, divorce and the law

Canadian law views marriage as a legal agreement or contract between a man and a woman. Married people are considered equal partners. Marriage laws apply to all Canadian citizens and permanent residents. Many unmarried couples live together. In most provinces, unmarried heterosexual couples who have lived together for a certain period of time have legal status as "common-law" couples. They may call each other "husband" and "wife," or they may simply say "my partner."

Either the wife or the husband can ask for a divorce. This request will normally be approved by the courts if both people have agreed to end the marriage. Divorce will also be approved if one partner has been harmed through cruelty, adultery or a similar injustice.

Birth control and family planning

Many people use birth control. It is a matter of personal choice. Women can get a prescription for birth control pills from a doctor. Family planning information is available from government departments of health and public health offices, as well as from local health clinics. Abortion is legal but is only available from a doctor.

Youth and their parents

When children arrive in Canada, they usually learn about Canadian life quickly through schools, television, movies and music. If they need to learn English or French, they often learn it quite quickly.

Parents find out about Canadian life differently, as they search for housing and work. They too may need to learn English or French, but often need more time than their children to do so.

If you have children, you will know that you see the world somewhat differently than they do, because you are older and have more life experience. After immigrating to Canada, however, you may find that these differences increase, because you are having different experiences of Canadian life. These differences affect the behaviour of all family members and can lead to tension in the family between parents and their children.

Discussing concerns with teachers, doctors, public health workers, social workers, settlement workers, and friends and relatives who have already settled in Canada will help you and your children understand your experiences and make good choices about your future.

Youth and the law

Youth in Canada who commit a crime are held accountable for their actions. However they are not dealt with in the same way as adult offenders. This is because they may not have an adult's understanding of their crime. They are also more likely than adult offenders to be reformed and become law-abiding citizens. The law for young offenders is called the *Youth Criminal Justice Act*.

Standards and Expectations

Some of Canada's standards for public behaviour may be more conservative than you are used to, while others may seem more liberal. For example, Canadians may seem impersonal and cold to some newcomers; to others, we may seem overly friendly.

Important social standards

Social practices -- not laws -- govern many types of behaviour in Canada. Some traditions are well established and are politely but firmly enforced. For example:

- **Lining up, or queuing:** People normally line up or queue according to the principle of "first-come, first-served." They will be angry if you push ahead in a line-up instead of waiting your turn.
- **Not smoking in private homes:** Most Canadians do not smoke. When you are in people's homes, you should always ask their permission to smoke. If they do not smoke themselves, they may ask you to go outside to smoke.
- **Being on time:** You should always arrive on time -- at school, at work and for any meeting. People who are often late may be fired from their jobs or suspended from school. Many Canadians will not wait more than 10 or 15 minutes for someone who has a business meeting. For social events, people expect that you will arrive within half an hour of the stated time.
- **Respect for the environment:** Canadians respect the natural environment and expect people to avoid littering (dropping waste paper and other garbage on the street or throwing it out of your car). They will expect you to carry your garbage until you can find a proper garbage can.
- **Bargaining:** Bargaining for a better price is not common in Canada, but there are some exceptions. For example, almost everyone bargains for a better price when buying a car or a house, or other expensive items such as furniture. People who sell things privately may also bargain.
- **Smart shopping:** Stores compete with one another to attract customers, so it is wise to check and compare prices at different stores before you buy. **Note:** The price marked on goods in stores does not usually include the federal and provincial sales taxes, which add from 7 percent to 15 percent to the cost of an item, depending on the province in which you buy it.

If you have questions about social standards or customs, you can ask the local immigrant-serving organization for advice. If you have been matched with a Canadian family under the Host Program, the family members can help answer your questions as well.

Some Canadian Laws

Some laws you should be aware of

- It is illegal to drive without a driver's licence, registration and insurance.
- It is illegal to drive if you have been drinking alcohol.
- The driver and all passengers must wear seat belts at all times when driving in Canada.
- Babies and children who are too small to wear seat belts must be placed in properly installed infant or child car seats, appropriate to the age and weight of the child.
- Children under 12 years of age cannot be left at home alone, or to care for younger children.
- All children aged six to 16 must attend school.
- Smoking is not permitted in federal buildings, in elevators, on Canadian airlines, on buses and on other public transportation, nor in many banks, shops, restaurants and other public places (some municipalities have banned smoking in all public buildings).
- Depending on which part of Canada you live in, you must be either 18 or 19 years old to buy or drink alcohol in any form.
- It is against the law to hit your spouse or children, either in the home or in public.
- It is illegal to use, buy or sell marijuana, heroin, cocaine and other addictive drugs.
- It is illegal to make any kind of sexual remarks or advances if the other person does not like them.

Interacting with Officials

Knowing how to behave and what to expect can be very useful when you are dealing with public officials and people in authority. Usually, there is no need to worry about making mistakes. Except for matters of law, most Canadians do not insist on strict formality. Officials who know that you are a newcomer will make allowances for your inexperience with Canadian ways.

People in authority

In Canada, a person's authority is related to his or her position and responsibility. Women hold the same kinds of positions as men and have the same kinds of authority. People do not have authority just because of their name, status, social class or sex.

Public officials

Public officials will normally treat you in a polite but impersonal way. Public officials follow set procedures. They do not make the rules. They may not want to or be able to become involved with your situation. Do not respond to them in a personal or emotional way. Never try to bribe a public official. Bribery and other forms of corruption are illegal and will offend most Canadians.

Police officers

The police are part of the community and are accountable to the public. They may be either men or women. They are trained to serve and protect the public, including you. Police operate within strict regulations and follow established procedures. Canadians expect honesty and fairness from the police.

Calling the police

Most cities and towns have an emergency number for the police. Call this number if you or someone else is hurt or in danger, or if you see a crime taking place. In most parts of Canada, the emergency number is 911. Emergency numbers are always printed inside the front cover of the telephone book.

What if you are questioned by a police officer?

- Call the police officer "officer."
- Accept the police officer's authority; do not try to argue.
- Be ready to show identification if a police officer asks you for it. If you are stopped by the police while driving a car, the officer will probably ask you for your driver's licence, proof of insurance and car registration.
- Tell the officer the facts about what has happened. Do not offer your own opinion.
- Never try to give money to a police officer. Canadians do not bribe police officers. It is a serious crime to do this.

What if you are arrested by a police officer?

- Police officers must tell you who they are and show you their badge number.
- They must explain why they are arresting you and tell you what your rights are.
- They must allow you to call a lawyer right away. If you don't have a lawyer, they must give you the Legal Aid telephone number and let you call.
- You do not have to give any information, other than your name and address, until you have talked to a lawyer.