

Chinese Immigrant Orientation Program

Module 7

Your rights and obligations

Objective

This module will help you to understand the rights, freedoms, obligations and responsibilities of being a Canadian citizen.

Goals

You will learn about:

Rights for all Citizens
Becoming a Canadian Citizen

You should be aware of your rights and obligations. Having the right to participate in Canadian society also means that you have a responsibility to respect the rights and freedoms of others and to obey Canada's laws.

Personal rights and freedoms

The *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* describes the basic principles and values by which Canadians live. The Charter is part of Canada's Constitution. The Charter protects you from the moment you arrive on Canadian soil. It gives everyone in Canada the following fundamental rights and freedoms:

- the right to life, liberty and personal security;
- freedom of conscience and religion;
- freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression, including freedom of the press and other media of communication;
- freedom to hold peaceful meetings;
- freedom to join groups;
- the right to live and work anywhere in Canada;
- protection from unreasonable search or seizure and arbitrary detainment and imprisonment;
- the right to be presumed innocent until proven guilty;
- the right to have a lawyer;
- the right to a fair trial, through due process of law; and
- the right to equal protection and benefit under the law, without discrimination.

Children's rights

In Canada, you are required by law to properly care for your children. Police, doctors, teachers and children's aid officials will act when children are being abused. This includes any form of harm and abuse -- physical, psychological or sexual. All forms of child abuse are serious crimes. In serious cases of abuse, children can be taken away from their parents.

Physical abuse is any intentional physical contact that causes injury. For example, spanking a child long enough or hard enough to cause bruises, or spanking with anything other than an open hand, is a form of abuse. Some cultural practices, such as female circumcision, are also considered physical abuse and are against the law.

Psychological abuse includes terror and humiliation.

Sexual abuse includes any form of sexual contact between an adult and a child.

Neglect is also a form of child abuse. Parents who fail to protect and provide for their children are guilty of neglect. By law, children under 12 cannot be left alone to look after themselves or younger siblings.

Kids' "helplines" are available for children who need someone to help them or just need someone to talk to.

Women's rights

In Canada, women have the same legal status, rights and opportunities as men. Most Canadian men respect women as equals -- socially, in the workplace and in the home. Violence against women is against the law. Women who are abused can seek help for themselves and their children in local shelters. They are also entitled to legal protection to keep them safe.

Senior citizens' rights

A senior citizen is someone 65 years of age or older. It is common in Canadian society for healthy senior citizens to live on their own, instead of living with their children. Older people who need special care often move to a retirement or nursing home that provides trained staff and health-care workers. However, many Canadians still care for older family members in their own home.

Old Age Security: The Old Age Security (OAS) program ensures a basic income to all people in Canada 65 years of age or over who meet the residence requirements. Usually, OAS is paid after a person has lived in Canada at least 10 years, although people who have lived or worked in countries with which Canada has an agreement may qualify after as little as one year. Low-income people who get OAS may also qualify for the Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) and their spouses (or widows) may also qualify for the Spouse's Allowance if they are between 60 and 64 years of age.

The Canada Pension Plan pays benefits to contributors in the event of retirement or disability, as well as benefits to surviving spouses and orphans in the event of death of a contributor. All workers in Canada contribute to the plan. You may also be eligible for old age security benefits from your former country.

Becoming a Canadian citizen

Once you have been in Canada for at least three years, you may apply to become a Canadian citizen. Immigrants who become citizens have the same rights as citizens who were born in Canada. As a citizen you can:

- vote and be a candidate for political office in federal, provincial and territorial elections;
- apply for a Canadian passport;
- enter and leave Canada freely;
- enjoy full economic rights, including the right to own any type of property; and
- be eligible for some pension benefits.

An adult applying for Canadian citizenship must:

- be at least 18 years old;
- be a permanent resident of Canada who entered the country legally;
- have lived in Canada for three of the four years before applying for citizenship;
- speak either English or French;
- know something about Canada's history, geography, system of government and voting;
- know the rights and responsibilities of citizenship;
- apply for citizenship and pass the citizenship test; and
- take the oath of citizenship.

You cannot become a Canadian citizen if you:

- are considered a risk to Canada's security;
- are under a deportation order;
- are in prison, on parole from prison or on probation; or
- have been found guilty of a serious crime within the past three years.

Responsible and active citizenship

For many Canadians, being a good citizen means getting involved in their community. Regardless of your interests, contributing to your society is rewarding and is appreciated by others who, like you, are proud to make Canada their home. Getting involved in volunteer activities is also an excellent way to meet new people, make friends, practise English or French, and learn about Canadian customs.