

# Adjusting to life in Canada.

## Understanding the first few months

Your child has come to a strange, new place, can't speak the language and doesn't have friends. How scary!! She is so lost and frightened. She wants to talk to other people but she feels stupid. She is so lonely.

You feel desperate – you want her to settle in immediately and begin to speak English fluently. You want her to get high grades on her report card and go to a private school where you think the education is better. You are worried.

BUT learning a new language takes time and is hard work. Students typically spend 2-3 years in ESL and 1-2 years in transitional. It is not unusual for students who come to high school with very limited English to spend an additional 1-2 years in ESL. A new language takes students up to 7 years to attain true fluency.

When she can't communicate, she can get depressed, even at a young age. She might look lazy or get angry or cry easily. She might fight in school. She might see her Canadian friends talk back to their parents and begin to act disrespectfully to you. For teenagers it is even worse because they are becoming adults and are going through hormonal changes.

## How you can help

Your child needs your love, support and constant, gentle, firm care.

1. Get her **out of the house** right away into activities in an English environment. These should be non-threatening – soccer, jazz dance, art, horseback riding, bike riding, skateboarding, gymnastics or wall-climbing. Vancouver has a *plethora* (lots) of fun things to do. People learn best from PLAY and so give lots of play time.
2. Give her **3 choices** out of which she **MUST** choose two. They should be fun with no expectation except to be happy and have a good time. She will say **NO** and you must not listen to her. Agree that she can go three times before she quits – this gives her time to see that it is fun and safe. She must learn to **EXPLORE** and try new things – this opportunity might never come again in her life.

[Scouts Canada](#) and [Girl Guides](#) help to make friends and learn Canadian culture. Find a group near you and sign up. She could join with a friend. [Facebook](#)

3. **Go with her to any activity** and encourage her - reassure her that it will all be okay. Encourage her to try even if she fails. Failing is ok because she is learning.
4. **Set up house rules** for evening schedule of work and for behavior. Follow them consistently but know that they might need to be changed. They should be clear and fair. Be gentle and firm. **Control phone games, texting, iPad and online activity.**

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5. **Get 10-20 books** from the library each week - children's picture books, especially with CDs (ask the librarian)- and schedule at least **30 minutes of reading each day**. Join her in this activity so that she has a good role model. :) Get free videos there too! Watch one or two movies a week together. Talk about them.

6. **Talk to the teacher** (get an interpreter from SWIS to help you if your English is not strong). Tell the teacher that you will help in any way with your child and want to know how to help. Then do it. The teachers really understand immigrant kids. Public schools in Vancouver are very high quality and graduates go to Harvard, Princeton, MIT, Stanford, UofT, McGill, etc. so trust the teachers.

7. **Schools don't give a lot of homework** to a new immigrant. They know that she needs to improve her English communication (listening and speaking) and develop vocabulary before she can do the work in school. So your child will have HOURS after school with nothing to do. You can get a tutor to provide more support and/or put her in Little Mountain, Panda (Richmond), Reading Town, or Kumon.

8. **Teach her how to use her agenda / planner** from school for evening planning. Look at it **every day** after school while having a snack and make sure she writes down what she will do that night. Fill in the after school activities one week ahead, doctor's appointments, reading time, music practice, EVERYTHING. This will really prepare her for high school.

9. **Do not abandon** her to do work alone. She does not know what to do or how to do it. The system is different from Asia. Ask her to get clear instructions from the teacher about how to do her work and tell her to just **DO HER BEST**. Sit with her.

10. Make sure she **goes to be EARLY** every day, even the weekends. Learning a new language and having to speak it all day is extremely tiring. If kids are sleepy, they can't hear the teacher. They can't remember well enough. They are grumpy.

11. **Be strict with food** and keep candy, chocolate and sweets out of reach. Or out of the house completely. When a child is tired, she wants sugar. Sugar gives quick energy, but then leaves as quickly with even LESS energy. Give healthy snacks – fruit, yogurt (organic unsweetened), peanut butter (organic unsweetened) and good bread (low sugar), fish, meat, prunes (梅干), raisins, seeds and nuts. Limit fast food. Kids moving to Vancouver often get **fat and lazy** from poor diet and lifestyle. Be warned! Keep your kid busy and active.

12. **Do NOT compare** your child to other children. Each child learns differently and at different rates. Ask her what she wants to learn more about and then provide those resources. Let her know you expect her to be  
*curious, creative and capable.*