



Starting Over in Canada: Newcomer Wellbeing

An explainer and settling-in wellbeing checklist · Created by Simar Gill Lowther, MACP, RP (CRPO)
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At a glance

- Moving to a new country brings hope, opportunity, and also significant stress.
- Loneliness, homesickness, and feeling "between two worlds" are common for newcomers.
- Building connection while keeping ties to your culture supports wellbeing.

The stress of starting over

Settling in Canada can involve finding housing and work, learning new systems, adjusting to the climate, and sometimes working in jobs below your training. Many newcomers also carry worry for family back home. Psychologists call the stress of adapting to a new culture "acculturative stress."

Different ways of adapting

Research by John Berry describes several ways people adapt to a new culture. People who keep their own cultural identity while also building connections in the new country, called integration, tend to experience the best wellbeing.

Approach	What it looks like
Integration	Keeping your culture and language, while building new connections
Assimilation	Letting go of your culture to fit in
Separation	Keeping your culture, with little connection to the new community
Marginalization	Feeling disconnected from both cultures

Common feelings

- Homesickness and missing family, food, and festivals
- Loneliness or isolation
- Frustration with language or job barriers
- Guilt about leaving family behind
- Pride and hope alongside grief

What the research says

People who maintain their heritage culture while engaging with the new society (integration) tend to show the best adaptation and wellbeing (Berry, 1997).

Canadian clinical guidelines highlight the importance of social support, culturally responsive care, and addressing settlement stress for immigrant and refugee mental health (Kirmayer et al., 2011).

Tool: My Settling-In Wellbeing Checklist

Area	Done?	Next step
I have a family doctor or know where to find a walk-in clinic	☐	
I know about local settlement and newcomer services	☐	
I have at least one person here I can talk to	☐	
I've found a community, faith, or cultural group	☐	
I stay in regular contact with family back home	☐	
I have a routine for sleep, meals, and movement	☐	
I've found one thing I enjoy about my new city	☐	
I know where to get help in my language	☐	

Holding both cultures

Traditions, foods, or practices from home I want to keep:

New experiences in Canada I want to try:

Strategies to try

- **Connect in your language.** Cultural associations and faith communities can ease loneliness.
- **Be patient with yourself.** Adjusting takes time, often years.
- **Name the grief.** Leaving home involves real loss, even when the move was your choice.
- **Explore local supports.** Settlement agencies offer help with employment, language, and community.
- **Celebrate milestones.** Notice how far you've come.

Strategies you may not have heard of

These less common, evidence-informed techniques go beyond the usual advice. Try one at a time and notice what works for you.

- **Find your "third place."** A third place is somewhere that's neither home nor work, like a café, library, gurdwara, mosque, temple, church, or community centre, where you can become a familiar face.
- **Translate your skills.** List your skills and experience in Canadian terms. It can rebuild confidence when job searching.
- **Hold a weekly culture ritual.** Cook a meal from home, call family at the same time each week, or listen to music in your language.
- **Teach something.** Share your language, a recipe, or a tradition with someone new. Contributing builds belonging.

Journal prompts

Take your time with these. Write freely; there are no right answers.

What do I miss most about home?

What has surprised me about life in Canada?

What strengths have helped me through this transition?

What does "home" mean to me now?

When to reach out for support

If you're feeling isolated, overwhelmed, or low as you settle in, you don't have to manage alone. Our team offers culturally responsive therapy in English, Hindi, Punjabi, and Urdu, in person in Oshawa and virtually across Ontario.

Insightful Journey Inc. offers therapy in person in Oshawa and virtually across Ontario, in English, Hindi, Punjabi, and Urdu. Direct billing available.

[Book a free consultation](#) · 647-982-2527 (call, text, or WhatsApp)

In crisis? Call or text 9-8-8, or call 911.

This resource is for education and self-reflection. It is not a diagnostic tool and is not a substitute for professional assessment or care.

References

Berry, J. W. (1997). Immigration, acculturation, and adaptation. *Applied Psychology*, 46(1), 5–34.

Kirmayer, L. J., et al. (2011). Common mental health problems in immigrants and refugees: General approach in primary care. *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, 183(12), E959–E967.

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