



Creating Welcoming School Environments for Newcomer Students

All school staff have a unique role to play in creating a welcoming environment and in orienting and supporting newcomer students. This begins with practicing cultural humility. When staff members identify their assumptions, center the expertise and wisdom of newcomer students, reflect critically on their implicit biases, and work to build their understanding of the individual experiences of newcomer students, they can engage more authentically with newcomer students and provide meaningful support when needed.

Below are some suggestions and reflection questions to help school staff to create environments that support the mental health of students who are newcomers to Canada:

The first welcome:

- Consider organizing an open house with the support of settlement workers and invite families to bring along a supportive adult if needed.
- Provide comfortable spaces for families to gather (to read announcements in their first language or meet fellow families and parents/caregivers).
- Post multiple signs across the school in the top languages used.

Orientation to school:

- Dedicate ample time for orientation to demonstrate routines and outline safety procedures in a student/parent/caregiver's first language.
- Provide details to facilitate and encourage entry into extracurricular activities.
- Inform families of the roles of different adults within the school.

Communication:

- As needed, ensure regular access to competent adult interpreters.
- Inquire about students' strengths and abilities during an intake interview.
- Remain flexible when connecting with parents/caregivers. Consider sending families a transcript of your conversation to make it more accessible for them to translate, if needed.

Reflect:

1. How can we start each day so that students feel welcome and have a strong sense of belonging?
2. How might power imbalances play out between school staff and newcomer students/parents/caregivers and how might we address this?
3. How can I create relationships with students/parents/caregivers/families to best provide support when challenges arise?
4. How can I co-create or invite newcomer students to create a space that feels affirming of their identities?

