

ADAPTING TO A NEW CULTURE, COUNTRY, AND COMMUNITY



Adapting to a New Culture, Country, and Community

“ Anytime I meet people who got to make the deliberate choice, whose parents chose Canada, I’m jealous. Because I think being able to choose it, rather than being Canadian by default, is an amazing statement of attachment to Canada.

- Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada

While emigrating to a foreign country is an exciting experience, it can be a difficult adjustment. Getting used to another country's cultural practices on your own is intimidating, especially if it's the first time you're leaving your home country. Often, individuals and their families experience a variety of emotions, including the following:

- Uneasiness
- Helplessness
- Frustration
- Anxiety
- Doubt
- Uncertainty
- Lack of confidence
- Anger

If you or your family members have or are experiencing any of the emotions above, know that your feelings are normal. People adjusting to a new country often experience a range of emotions in varying degrees. This adjustment may resemble the following:

- Your first twelve months in Canada will be emotional and full of change. There will be many things to learn.
- You will face many challenges.
- You may have to learn English/French or improve your language skills.
- You may need education or training of some nature.
- You may have to accept a job or home that is different than you expected.
- There may be significant differences between your old life and your new one.

Keep in mind that others are adjusting with you.

In many cases when individuals make the move to a new country, family is accompanying them. It is important to remember that your family will be facing many of the same issues but also some that are different.

If there are members of your family who were not directly involved in the decision to move to Canada, they may be feeling little control over what is happening in their lives. This can amplify the emotions and stress associated with adjusting to life in a new country.



For some children, any change can be traumatic, including moving to a new country and needing to leave their school and friends as a result. If you have a significant other that moved with you, they may feel very lonely for friends and relatives. It is important to allow your family to communicate how they feel about living in their new home.

How you handle the stress of change is important in finding the balance that's right for you, your partner, and your family. Above all, do not isolate yourself from others. Isolation can lead to depression and make adjusting infinitely more difficult.

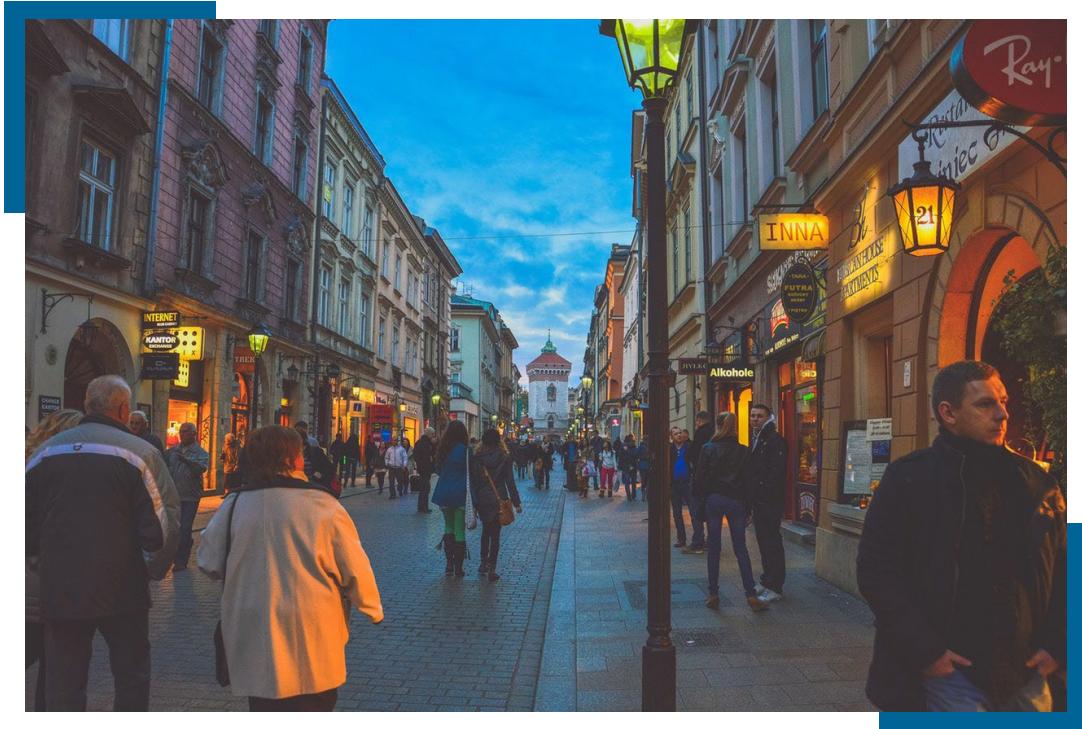
Culture Shock

Upon arriving in Canada, you may experience any number of startling psychological reactions. One of which is culture shock.

Culture shock is a term often used to describe the psychological and physical state felt by people arriving in a foreign country. Culture shock can be experienced when travelling, living, working, or studying abroad.

According to Mary Ann Santoro Bellini, Ph.D., a Clinical Psychologist specializing in counselling, individuals who have left their native country to study, work, or live abroad, experience the following common stages of adapting to culture shock:

NOTE: It is important to understand that not everyone will go through an adjustment to culture that could be labeled “shock,” and that these stages can be much less severe and/or more short-lived than described here.



Honeymoon Period

While preparing to relocate, and during the first days or weeks in the new country, you may experience a Honeymoon Period during which you will feel extreme joy and enthusiasm. Responding to the new environment with fascination, you will enjoy the differences in fashion, food, social customs, etc. This exhilarating period is full of observation and discoveries and lasts a few days to a few weeks.

Like most honeymoons, however, this stage eventually ends.



Rejection

The next phase of Culture Shock Syndrome is referred to as the period of Rejection. This stage is marked by criticism, resentment, and anger. When you set out to study, live, or work in a new country, you are likely to experience difficulties with language, housing, friends, schoolwork, and/or understanding the idiosyncrasies of the local culture, which can result in frustration.

The Rejection period can be triggered by the realization that, as an outsider in a new culture, language or misunderstandings of cultural cues can often make the simplest task seem like a daunting challenge.

Regression and Isolation

The extreme letdown experienced during the Rejection Period can prompt you to become critical of the new environment – of the people, their culture, and of all the perceived differences with the culture at home. This letdown may propel you into the stage of Regression and Isolation. In this stage, the culture you come from is idealized. For example, an Italian student studying in Canada for a semester may indiscriminately view their Italian university and past experiences or friendships as superior, regardless of any problems inherent to those relationships.

Symptoms exhibited during this period include anxiety, sadness, homesickness, and anger. These feelings can manifest themselves in the following changes in behaviour:

- Inappropriate anger over slight delays and minor frustrations
- Changes in sleep patterns
- Compulsive eating and/or drinking
- Irritability
- Poor concentration
- Unexplainable crying

The stage of Regression and Isolation is variable in length but can last up to eight weeks.

Gradually, the crisis of Regression and Isolation is resolved, allowing the individual to begin recovery.



According to **Citizenship and Immigration Canada**, these are the final common stages of adapting to culture shock:

Gradual Adjustment or Recovery

During this stage of adjustment, you may experience the following:

- Feel more in control of your life as you gain a better understanding of Canada
- Feel more confident in your language skills
- Gradually get involved in the community
- Have a better understanding of how to adapt to life in Canada
- Have a better sense of what you need to do to get what you want in Canada



Acceptance and Adjustment

During this stage of adjustment you will likely experience the following:

- Feel more comfortable in Canada
- Have made some friends and be more involved in your new community
- Understand better how things are done in Canada
- Be studying, planning to return to school, or working at better jobs
- Generally feel content about having come to Canada

Health Care

When you arrive in Canada, one of the first things you'll want to do is apply for a Canadian health insurance card. All Canadian citizens and permanent residents are eligible for health insurance in Canada so long as they have a valid health insurance card. Canada's public health care system is funded through taxes and administered by the provinces and territories.

For information on what public health care covers, how to get a health insurance card, and why you may want to seek additional private health care coverage, please visit the **Government of Canada website**. You can also attain free pamphlets on a variety of topics from **Health Canada**, doctors' offices, and pharmacies.



Education

If you have children or plan on having children in the future, it is important to know that all elementary and secondary school children receive a public education free of charge. Public education is paid for through taxes and is administered by the provinces and territories in cooperation with local school boards.

For more information about Canada's education system, visit the **Ministry of Education website** for the province or territory you live in.

If you are feeling overwhelming stress trying to adapt to Canadian culture and to understand its immigration processes, please seek help through your Employee or Student Assistance Program.

WHO WE ARE

Aspiria Corp. is the only company in Canada focused solely on providing Employee Assistance Program (EAP) and Student Assistance Program (SAP) services.

Aspiria was founded in 2003 by Charles Benayon in response to market changes in the EAP industry. As the industry consolidated and providers of EAP services diversified into other markets, our founder recognized the opportunity to develop a unique and innovative EAP offering to the underserved small- and medium-sized employer.

In 2011, we utilized a similar strategy to expand our mental health service offering to another much-needed sector: the college and university student market. Today, Aspiria serves over 315,000 employees, students, and their families in Canada and internationally.

One hundred per cent Canadian-owned, Aspiria provides a solution-based suite of mental health and wellness EAP/SAP services to all employer and educational sectors across the country when and where they're needed most.

Aspiria recognizes the value and importance of promoting, fostering, and maintaining the well-being of its clients, employees, students, and their families. Our mission is to create expert health solutions that empower organizations and their people. Professional and nimble, our clients recognize us for our integrity, transparency, and accountability in all that we do.