

# Promising Practices: Working with Newcomer Families

# Who are Newcomers?



## Immigrants

- Generally are making a choice to come
- May be well educated in their home country
- Usually have some financial or community support
- May come with some knowledge of English
- Often have experienced some success in their home country

## Refugees

- Usually had to flee their country
- Possibly illiterate in 1st language although some are highly educated
- Trauma and loss is great
- Many single mother families
- Less likely to know any English
- Varying family composition

- *Knowledgeable*
- *Experienced parents*
- *Love their families*
- *Have dreams and goals*
- *Keen*
- *Resilient*
- *Financial stress*
- *Emotional stress*
- *Isolated*

The primary goal when working with newcomers is making connections.





We need to put our assumptions aside and find our common values.

It is important to learn about the cultural and religious practices of the people we are working with.

*Never assume a nod means someone understands or agrees with you.*

# What do we need to know?



# Where do we start?



# What can happen in Newcomer families?

- Power dynamics in the families change
  - parent/child
  - husband/wife





# Considerations for building a program geared to newcomers:

- Comfort level
- Location
- Transportation
- Childcare
- Hiring and using resources within the community
- Interpreters
- Food

# Can we use existing parenting programs with newcomers?





# What are other possibilities for connecting with newcomers?



# It's so important to be self reflective:

- Voice tone and body language
- Pausing
- Listening
- Observing
- **Knowing resources**



# When newcomers have been traumatized:

- **Flashbacks** or a re-experience can occur by exposure to reminders and anniversaries.



We need to be constantly aware

*If an adult or child resists an activity  
there is a reason.*

*Always provide choices.*

Provide opportunities and ways for people to share their lives with you and with each other without necessarily sharing a common language

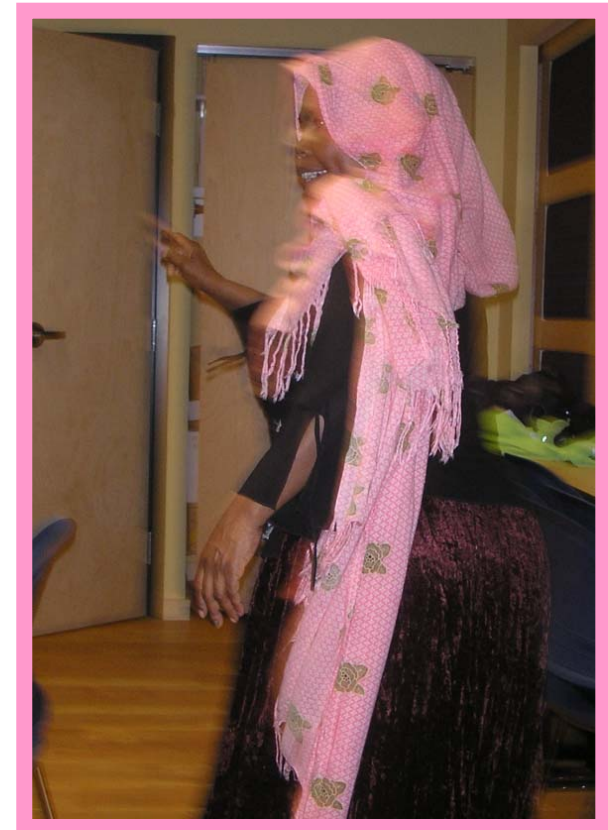


# Sharing Culture and Strengths





# Role plays



**Message from a mom.**  
**“In home country lots of time, lots of help; but in Canada, Mom Work!  
Work! Work! No help. No time for baby.”**

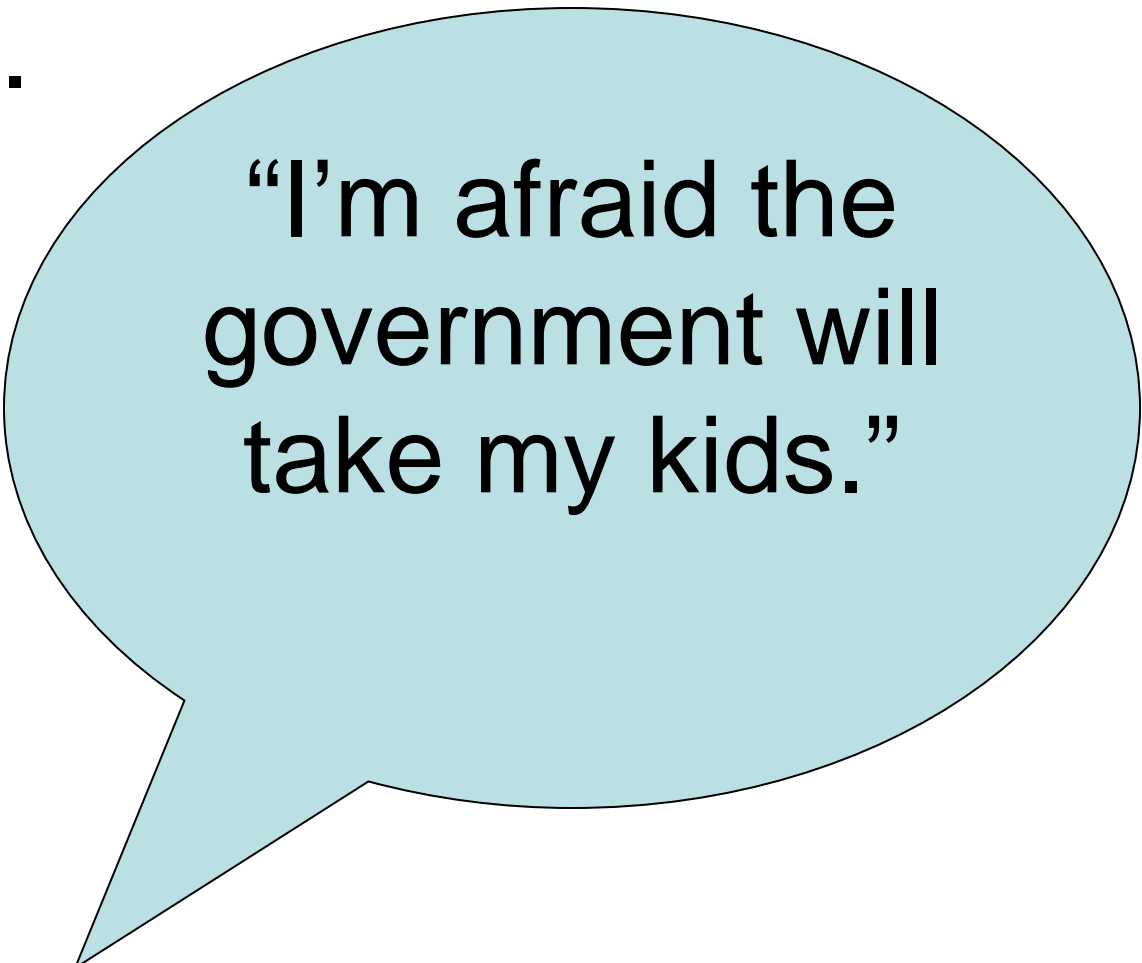
Role play: Canada, cold, go outside, dress, dress  
dress, so hard, too much work, stay inside, lonely,  
busy, active children, hard, no support



# Serious Discussions



Be Flexible  
but  
Be Prepared.



“I’m afraid the  
government will  
take my kids.”



Sharing rhymes from their own language



Connecting relaxing and having fun





A photograph showing a young child with dark hair and a slight smile, wearing a green and white jacket, looking towards the left. Next to the child is a woman with dark hair and glasses, wearing a grey hoodie, also looking towards the left. The background is slightly blurred, showing other people and what appears to be an indoor setting. The text "Celebrate the Diversity" is overlaid in the top left corner, and "But Also Remember to Celebrate the Similarities." is overlaid in the bottom right corner.

Celebrate the Diversity

But Also  
Remember to Celebrate the  
Similarities.

**m****osaic**

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Newcomer Family Resource Network

[www.mosaicnet.ca](http://www.mosaicnet.ca)

nobody's perfect



For Newcomers



# As Nobody's Perfect Facilitators:

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- It is **not** our role to teach our own parenting values
- It **is** our role to help newcomers make decisions by providing information and respecting their parenting convictions

# Nobody's Perfect Resources

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# Parent-Child Time

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# Nobody's Perfect does **not** “teach” one “right” way to parent.

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It helps parents to recognize their strengths and to find positive ways to raise healthy, happy children.



# Facilitator is a “guide on the side,”

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Empathy and respect are important.

# Comments from participants:

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- No more lonely.
- Me happy. Baby uses toilet.
- I like. I breathe and wait; not yell at baby
- Now I talk him my language. Good.
- Make me forget bad things
- Fun, laughing together.
- Many, many new friends.

# Party at the last session



[www.nobodysperfect.ca](http://www.nobodysperfect.ca)

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**Carmen Paterson-Payne**

**(204) 231-3208**



*Changes in  
the family*

Photography by Fred Greenstein

*Healthy Start...*

**We're all  
having a baby.**



Healthy Start for Menck, Me is a collaborative pregnancy and new parent outreach program in Winnipeg sponsored by Ontario, and funded by Health Canada and the Saskatchewan Department of Family Services. The purpose is to provide new participants in the Healthy Start for Menck, Me program.



# **Healthy Start for Mom & Me**

**prenatal and postnatal outreach**

**...and newcomers to Canada**



# What we do:

- Offer those who need interpreting to attend Knox Centre (church) site (1 of 8) – close to where many live
- Healthy low-cost foods served, take-home recipes and “Meal Bags” (ready-to-cook simple recipe and ingredients for \$1.50, serves 4 – 6)
- Group educational sessions, Wednesday afternoons, 2 hours in total
- Time after group for one-to-one time with staff team or each other
- Milk coupons available, vitamins, etc
- Individual home visits possible for follow-up







# What works?

- Welcoming, centralized, interpreted sessions – 15 -18 languages
- female community interpreters, paid for 2 hour session plus reminder calls
- people sit grouped by language
- slow choreography - taking turns
- key messages approach
- use of Powerpoint slides with simple visual and simple words



# What works *continued...*

- teach 1 or 2 English words each time
- team support – *outreach staff, public health nurses, dietitians, volunteer food prep help, childminders, interpreters and paperwork assistant*
- women (and some dads) love to be together, multiculturally
- asking questions of what their home culture does in relation to pregnancy, birth, parenting an infant



# Sample of PowerPoint slides from the newcomers' Healthy Start groups

Breast milk is the most important food for your baby.



Babies show they need and want their parents' attention by:



- looking at parent,
- reaching out with hands,
- trying to touch parent,
- sparkling eyes, and
- sometimes by crying to be picked-up.



# WHAT AN INTERPRETER / PARTICIPANT SAYS...





# Some recent written comments from newcomer women:

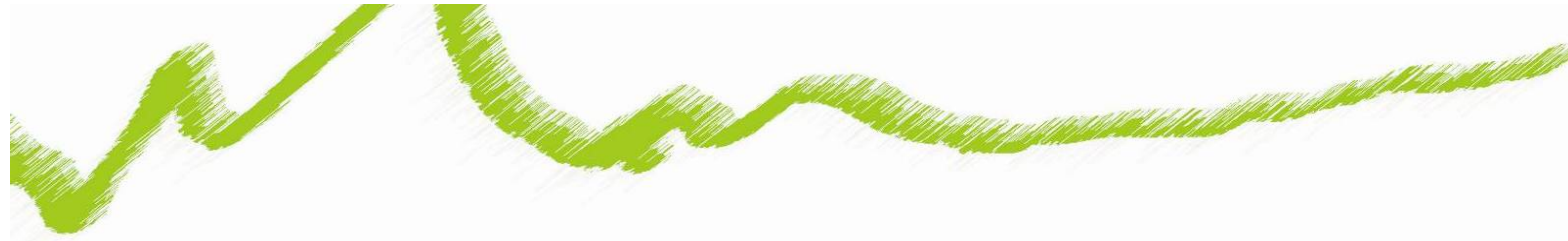
- *I talk to people from other cultures and learn new things.*
- *I loved food. I loved program. Every thing is good.*
- *To learn English, to no some information about Canada, about pregnanci.*
- *I like this program to come and learn I also like the healthy food.*



# LESSONS and CHALLENGES?

- Refugee family issues can be complex & strengths amazing
- Probe a bit, to get past the politeness and nods
- Keep informational messages very short, to the point
- Don't hide things out of "sensitivity" – e.g. birth control devices are on display, condoms available, HIV information...etc.
- It's very do-able to work with multiple languages at one time
- Multi-lingual model needs lots of structure and does limit the interaction possible in unilingual group situations.
- It's GREAT fun. Very rewarding. Builds community!





# IRCOM Newcomer Family Programs

Winnipeg, Manitoba

The Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization of Manitoba (IRCOM) Inc.



# IMPACT

## Immigrants Meeting Parents And Children Together





# What do children need from their parents



**IMPACT** aims to help parents build on the skills they already have while navigating a new culture and community.

# Opportunities to share and laugh



A safe place helps parents learn about one another and themselves and to ask the questions they might otherwise be afraid to ask.





# Family to Family



# IRCOM's Family to Family program seeks to...



- Decrease isolation of newcomers through positive, family to family interaction with Canadian families
- Raise public awareness about newcomers' lives in Canada
- Bring together Canadian and Newcomer families by building bridges and friendships





# Families take part in many fun activities...



Visiting the forks

Going on a boat tour

Feeding ducks at Assiniboine Park

Sharing an Eritrean coffee ceremony

Sharing family dinners together

Visiting splash pads and parks

Attending Folklorama

Visiting the zoo

Bowling



# Family to Family is important because...

Both Canadian and Newcomer families learn a great deal about their partner family's culture

Newcomers get the support of not just an individual or even a family, but the community that their partner family belongs to

Newcomers become part of new circles, some that have led to employment and greater integration

To this day there are partner families from 2008 and 2009 that still see each other monthly and continue to build stronger communities







# UNITY



# UNITY is...

A parenting support group for mothers & children

Participant lead

Designed to empower families by providing them with helpful tips and Canadian alternatives to cultural parenting practices that are not relevant in the Canadian context

A place of sharing and learning from each this is culturally sensitive, non-judgmental and informal

Acknowledges that every culture has valuable ideas and practices to offer

Encourages the sharing of experiences, opinions and ideas





Questions



Thank You!

**Dorota Blumczynska, Executive Director**

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[www.ircom.ca](http://www.ircom.ca)



# **“Our Families Can Talk About Anything!” Project**

Education Sessions for Immigrant and Refugee Parents



Project funded by Manitoba Labour and Immigration



# SERC

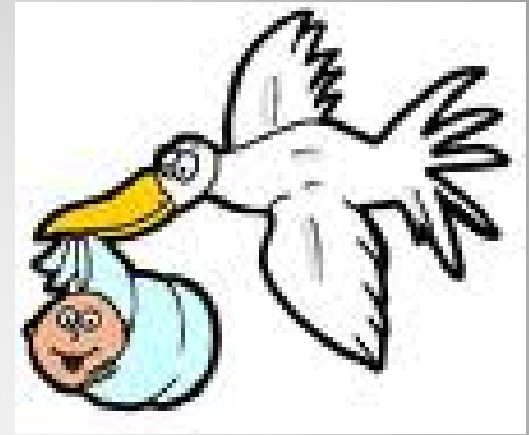
- Sexuality Education Resource Centre
- Taboo Subjects 'R Us!



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# Assumptions

- We are all sexual beings  
(This is how we all got here)



- Parents play an important role in the overall health of their children, including sexual health



But sexuality is taboo in most cultures...



*“Babies come from a special store.”*

*“You go out to the bush and God gives you a healthy baby”*



*“We get the baby from the hospital.”*



# Sexuality is not completely taboo everywhere...



## AIDS Campaign Billboards Ghana & Vietnam



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# What do newcomer parents want ?

## A better understanding of Canadian culture

*“We can’t do anything with our children, can’t discipline them... If we do, CFS will take our children.”*

*“Why can two women get married, but a man cannot have two wives?”*

*“Is it against the law to breastfeed in Canada? I don’t see anyone breastfeeding?”*

## How: Cultural Brokering

Explain Canadian customs, norms, society, laws. Some examples:

- Rights, freedoms in Canada - in society, workplace, family
- 911 (vis-à-vis child abuse/domestic violence)
- Child protection laws and the role of CFS
- Separation, divorce, division of property
- Domestic violence/zero tolerance



# What do newcomer parents want ?



**Parents feel  
disempowered...**



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*“It is important to learn all these things because children become very proud in Canada. They view parents as less intelligent because of the language. They are already integrated. As a parent, where do I stand in this society?”*

*Back home, children do physical work for example, they fetch water.*

*In Canada, they feel like kings.*

*It is important to learn all these things because children become very proud in Canada. They view parents as less intelligent because of the language. They are already integrated. As a parent, where do I stand in this society?*

***“Back home, children do physical work for example, they fetch water.  
In Canada, they feel like kings.”***





## How: Affirm their role

- **What are their values? What values do they want to pass on to their children?**
- **How can they pass along their values and also help children adapt to Canadian culture?**

*“We learned how to give advice and direction to our children and when we share with our children what we are learning, they got very excited.”*

*“What I’ve gained? In the topic of communication. Because of that, I got more knowledge of how I can deal with my kids. Back home I didn’t know about this. We know that our children are getting information but now I have talked with my kids.”*

*“We learned how to give advice and direction to our children and when we share with our children what we are learning, they got very excited.”*

*“What I’ve gained? In the topic of communication. Because of that, I got more knowledge of how I can deal with my kids. Back home I didn’t know about this. We know that our children are getting information but now I have talked with my kids.”*

# What do newcomer parents want?

## Tools

*“I don’t have anything in my hands...”*





## How: Skills & Knowledge

- Parenting styles (Barb Coloroso)
- Communication with Children
- How to talk about sexuality with children & why is it important
- Decision-making Steps
- What children are learning about sexuality in school & child development
- Media, Internet Awareness
- More...

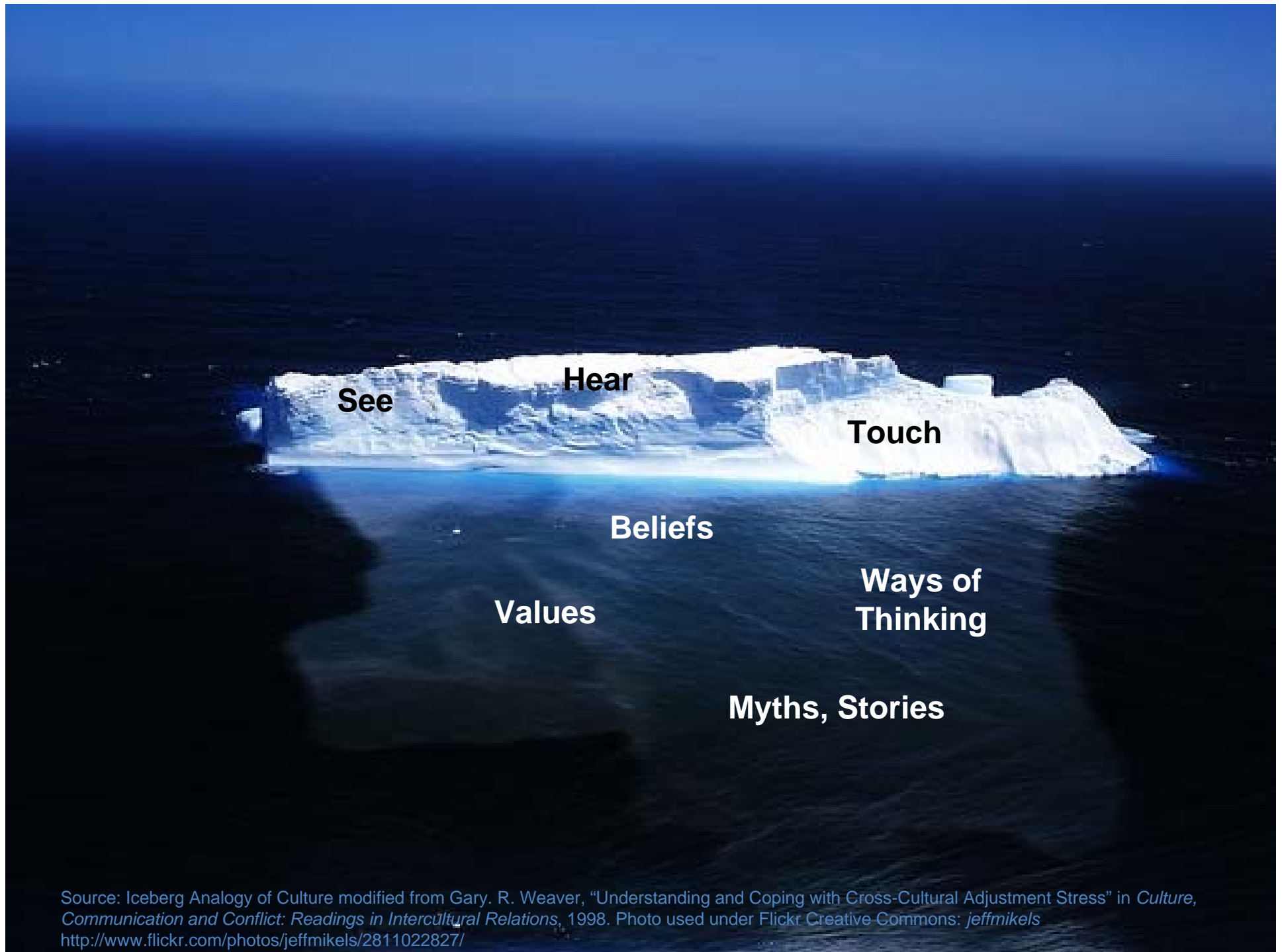
# What do newcomer parents want?

**To feel that their skills, experiences, culture and feelings are validated and valued**



# How: Integrate Culture and Adaptation

- What is culture? Culture shock?
- Stages of adaptation
- What are their beliefs and values?
- What did they learn about sexuality (any topic) growing up?
- What do they see in Canadian society?
- Does culture change? How?



**See**

**Hear**

**Touch**

**Beliefs**

**Values**

**Ways of  
Thinking**

**Myths, Stories**

Source: Iceberg Analogy of Culture modified from Gary. R. Weaver, "Understanding and Coping with Cross-Cultural Adjustment Stress" in *Culture, Communication and Conflict: Readings in Intercultural Relations*, 1998. Photo used under Flickr Creative Commons: [jeffmikels](http://www.flickr.com/photos/jeffmikels/2811022827/)  
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/jeffmikels/2811022827/>



## How: Build Cultural Competence

A process that involves:

- exploring culture,
- examining how culture has impacted you both personally / professionally, and
- applying these insights in order to interact with others more effectively

## How: Build Cultural Competence

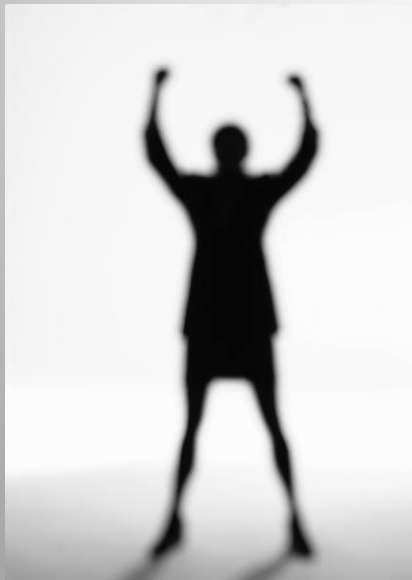
- Acknowledge your ethnocentricity
- Listen, ask, and learn about the other person's world view – their understanding of the problem and how to deal with it

# How: Build Cultural Competence

Collective versus individualistic cultures

OR

“Me” vs “We” cultures



# Independence vs Interdependence

*I like to be dependent, and so for ever  
with warmth and care of my mother  
my father , to love, kiss and embrace  
wear life happily in all their grace.*



*I like to be dependent, and so for ever  
on my kith and kin, for they all shower  
harsh and warm advices, complaints  
full wondering ,true and info giants.*

*My Dependence - Rabindranath Tagore*



# What do newcomer parents want?

## Solutions & Hope

- No (easy) solutions
- Provide information...
- “Finding the balance”
- “Third culture”
  - Keeping the good from both cultures
- Communication
- Affirm their strengths



# Processes

- Safe non-judgmental environment
- Build trust (taboo subjects later)
- Promote mutual exchange
- Affirm values, beliefs, present info as a choice
- Flexibility – go with participants
- Two-way learning process
- Evaluation – opportunity for a voice

# Accessibility

- Ethno-specific Model for newcomers without English
- Multicultural Model in English
- Build on assets in community - hire
- Partnerships
- The “usual” accessibility measures

# Successes

- Obvious changes, planned changes
- New information, new skills
- Plant the seeds
- Newcomers share info

*“We pass the information to others. We are now able to tell others”*





# Eritrean Parents Group

Parents were given “homework”

Over the next week, think about the following questions:

- What do children need?
- How can parents help children to grow up between two cultures?

Here is what they said...



*Discipline. Guide children toward good behaviours*



*Show children what they did wrong*

*Be a role model and set good examples for children*



*Spend more time with children*

*Receive ideas from and give ideas to children*



*Not to create pressure if situation does not harm children - relax*

*Give ways to children to solve problems and teach them responsibility for their actions*

*Praise and encourage children*

*Not only to give food, clothing but also to give love, humanity, pass beliefs, values, respect people*

*Do not reject children if they make mistakes; approach them with love. Be friends with them*

By the Eritrean Parents Group, Oct 2010 at SERC





# For more information...

Shereen Denetto, Special Projects Coordinator, [shereend@serc.mb.ca](mailto:shereend@serc.mb.ca), ph: 982-7812

Our website will be overhauled soon, but there are some good finds!

<http://www.serc.mb.ca/GE/WA/7>

- **Parents Group and Couples Group Handouts** (selected)- Translated into French, Arabic, Tigrinya, Swahili (English coming soon!). Under Additional Resources
- **Communication About Sexuality in Immigrant Families** – the basis of the parents group. How-to's in running an immigrant parents group focusing on sexuality related issues (dating, gender roles, freedoms, etc.). Under Guides/Manuals/Curricula
- HIV Pamphlet - **Women Taking Care of Ourselves & Staying Healthy in Canada: What Everyone Should Know** - for women translated into English, French, Spanish, Swahili, Arabic, Amharic, Oromo, Somali. Under Pamphlets and Factsheets

<http://www.serc.mb.ca/SERC/SP/WA>

- **Working With Immigrant Communities: A Guide for Service Providers.** Although a few years old, this guide contains excellent information about immigration processes, stages of adaptation, services, etc. Under Guides/Manuals/Curricula