

## Racism, Discrimination, and Religious Intolerance<sup>18</sup>

Canada prides itself on being a multicultural nation that values inclusion and diversity. However, Canada is not immune to racism, discrimination, and social exclusion. If you are not a member of a visible minority, the existence of these and other forms of xenophobia (the fear of a foreign people group) in this country may not be obvious. Unfortunately, newcomers and ethnic and religious minorities across Canada face forms of intolerance and discrimination every day in both subtle and obvious ways.

There is a good chance that the refugees you sponsor will experience discrimination as they work to integrate into Canadian life. Newcomers to Canada often look, speak, act, and dress differently than those around them. While some Canadians see the diverse multicultural fabric of our country as a blessing to be valued, others perceive it as a threat to their own identity.

As a sponsor, there is no way you will prevent all possible forms of discrimination towards the newcomers you are sponsoring. What you can do is be aware whether the newcomers identify it as a big issue or not. Racism, discrimination, and religious intolerance will affect the way in which they form social connections and integrate into life in Canada. Once you have established a comfortable and trusting relationship with a sponsored refugee, try talking about how they feel perceived by Canadians and how this impacts their interactions. Do not feel the urge to apologize for the intolerance of others but do be aware of the ways in which such intolerance can make newcomers feel unwelcome and want to avoid social interactions. To counter this, we encourage your sponsoring group to explore ways to make sponsored refugees feel fully welcomed and embraced by your community. You may consider talking to a local settlement agency or inter-cultural association for ideas on demonstrating welcome and engaging in community efforts that aim to do the same.

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<sup>18</sup> Adapted from “Helping Students Deal with Trauma Related to Geopolitical Violence and Islamophobia: A Guide for Educators.” Islamic Social Services and National Council of Canadian Muslims. [www.issacanada.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/ED-GUIDE-ENGLISH-BOOK-WEB-SEPT-15-2016.pdf](http://www.issacanada.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/ED-GUIDE-ENGLISH-BOOK-WEB-SEPT-15-2016.pdf)