

Lastenkasvatusvihkonen englannin kielellä (suppea versio)

# IMMIGRATION AND FAMILY

(abridged version)



Väestöliitto

# Immigration and family

## 1 Immigration is a huge thing for a family

### 1.1 Adapting is individual

Immigrating to a new country will greatly affect the lives of an individual and the family. You have to adapt to a new language, culture and society. The word *integration* is also used for adapting.

Integration into a new country is individual and takes time. Every family member experiences the same matters connected to integration, but they all do it at their own pace. One integrates quicker than the other.

Often the children integrate quicker than the parents. The children learn the new language and ways in day care, school and from friends. Parents, who at first have few contacts with Finns, integrate slower.

### 1.2 Integration happens gradually

Integration happens gradually and consists of different phases. At first life in the new country generally looks good and bright. After a short while you might suddenly feel homesick for your native country. However, with time daily life starts to form and life in the new country is gradually learnt.

When an immigrant wishes to keep his or her old culture and language and still adopts new things all the time, he or she is well on the road to integration. He or she has learnt to live in the new country, but has not forgotten his or her roots.

Integration can take years. There will be situations when an immigrant thinks there is no way to move forward. Then he or she may cling to what was before. The situation in the family may become difficult as the children adopt new values and ways all the time.

### 1.3 Integration brings new role expectations

A person has many different roles in the family, at work and with other people. He or she has learnt to act in a certain way in different situations.

Some old ways may perhaps no longer be useful in the new country. You have to start right from the beginning in many things. You have to learn a new foreign language, perhaps a completely new occupation. You must learn new ways of interacting with people. It takes time and practice.

The male and female roles may be completely different in the new country. Roles in the family might be turned upside down. Parents may feel helpless

in the new country. At such a time the children may start to guide and advise their parents.

Planning for the future may be difficult, because you do not know what opportunities the new country offers. It may be difficult to find work. So it is also difficult to plan the family finances.

It is important to think about and understand what the demands and consequences are that will follow when moving to a new country. It will then also be easier to accept those necessary changes that will happen in the family.

## **1.4 Integration time line**

You can outline your own and your family's situation by drawing an *integration time line*.

(You can find a model on the web pages of the Finnish Red Cross: [www.kotopolku.redcross.fi/Kotoutumiskaari.htm](http://www.kotopolku.redcross.fi/Kotoutumiskaari.htm) )

With its help you can clarify the different phases of integration and understand the reasons for different situations.

You mark the moments in the integration time line when your life started to go up or down, for example, getting a job or starting training. Downward moments can be, for example, feeling lonely or failing to get a job.

By recalling your own phases in life, you can examine your life in Finland. Good experiences give you strength, and bad experiences help you learn to understand your situation.

## **2 Challenges of immigration for couples**

### **2.1 A couple becomes integrated at a different pace**

A good and even a working relationship can encounter unexpected challenges in the new country. The family models no longer necessarily work. Relatives and acquaintances may have been left behind in the other country. There might not be a close person in the new home country to help when support is needed.

The roles of men and women may be different in the new country. In Finland a woman's status is quite strong. Women are often also financially independent of men. Finnish men help care for the children and do housework. Nearly all fathers participate in childbirth.

An immigrant may feel his or her life is contradictory. On the one hand, you have to find a new role as a man or a woman in the new different society. On the other, the spouse may not want the partner to change too much.

Integration of the couple may take place at a different pace. One spouse may feel helpless in the new country. Then a situation may be born where one spouse is dependant on the other.

One can support and help the other, but it must not lead to a situation where the other is too dependent. It can, for example, weaken one's own self-esteem.

Therefore, it is important, that both spouses learn to cope in the new country. It is important that both spouses take part in language courses, meetings with authorities and in events arranged for parents by school and daycare, even when one spouse's language skills are better than the other's.

## **2.2 Bicultural couples**

The integration of the immigrant in a relationship where one of the spouses is Finnish is especially important. If the immigrant is left to rely only on his or her spouse, his or her own adult role will suffer. Then the relationship will not develop into an equal one of two adults.

The lack of a common language can also cause challenges. It is difficult to talk about your feelings and wishes and solve problem situations, if the couple does not have a common language.

In a working relationship both parties respect each other and appreciate each other's culture. An open dialogue and considering matters together are keys to a good relationship.

Immigration demands a lot of energy, but you must not forget your relationship with your spouse. Particular attention must be paid to caring for the relationship even though the everyday problems seem to take all the time and energy. The parents' working relationship is also a good foundation when children are growing up.

## **3 Immigration challenges for the parents**

### **3.1 Old examples and a new society**

Parents generally use the example of their own parents, when they become a father or a mother. Being a parent is also influenced by the family and relatives, your own life situation and environment. In the new country the parents have to face a new situation: how to be a parent in the new country?

For many immigrants the immediate family has been an important supporter. In Finland, however, many have to cope without the help of the immediate family.

The parents hope that moving to a new country will guarantee the children a better life. When the parents learn the new country's language and culture, they, too, can guide the child to make the right choices in the new country.

The parents want to act so that their children will become accepted and valued members by the family, relatives and society. Matters that are accepted and valued, and ways of upbringing of a child vary in different countries and cultures.

There may be many differences in raising a child: what is good behaviour, how the child is taught and guided, how school attendance is supported and how boundaries are set. The concepts about the parents' roles may also often be different. Sometimes it is difficult for immigrants to Finland to understand Finnish parents' attitude towards their children.

The independence of the core family, that is, the father, mother and children, is valued in Finland. The parents solve the family's problems, and professional help is also used for difficult problems. Relatives do not interfere with the family's decisions the same way they do in many countries from which people immigrate to Finland.

Immigrant children often quickly absorb new ways in daycare or school. It can sometimes be difficult for the parents to understand their children's actions, and conflicts may arise. This happens especially when the parents' opinions do not accord with the new things the children have learnt. Then it may be difficult for the parent to convince the children and adolescents that he or she is qualified to teach life skills and knowledge.

Finnish society values the family by giving financial support, such as family allowance, maternity allowance or child's home care allowance. Society also organises children's daycare and education.

### **3.2 Adult in support of a child**

Integration into a new country may at times feel tedious and cause tiredness, sadness and even depression. At times like this it is difficult for the parents raise their children and offer them boundaries and love.

If the parents do not then get support, the children perhaps start to care for their parents. At the same time they seize the power and rights that belong to the parents.

Some parents have few contacts outside the home. They may not know very well the environment, where the child spends his or her time. In that case it is difficult for the parents to guide their children to make choices in connection with school and leisure time. It is important, therefore, that the parents get acquainted with the surrounding society and people and take part in the society's functions.

Sometimes the parents may feel helpless and lonely. Then they perhaps start to look for support and friendship in the child. The child is not, however, mature enough to act as a friend to an adult. He or she needs an adult for support. Adults should have adult friends and children friends their own age.

The parents of all children sometimes have to correct and guide a child to behave right. Then parents may treat a child in a way Finnish society does not approve. Finnish legislation absolutely forbids any physical punishment.

The parents have to find other ways to guide the child. Discussing with the child about the consequences of actions often helps.

### **3.3 Be present in the daily life of the child**

It is important for the parents to know what the child's daily life is like in the daycare centre, school, yard and hobbies. Thus the child gets a strong feeling that he or she gets support from the parents in every situation.

It is important that the parents learn Finnish or Swedish. Only then can they understand what is happening in society and what the children and adolescents are talking about. It is also important to be interested in the child and adolescent's life. One way to get acquainted with what interests them is to read adolescent magazines.

Every day and every year is important for the child. The child must experience the parents' support here and now. He or she cannot wait for very long until the parents have integrated or reached a certain level of language skill.

If your own strength and means run out, it is good to look for support. Parents of other children may be good supporters. Support is also given by municipal social workers, staff in daycare centres and schools, and all people working with children and adolescents.

## **4 Effect of immigration on the child**

### **4.1 Early interaction is important**

A child starts to form a concept of him or herself and the surrounding world straight after birth. However, this happens only in interaction with parents.

An adult cares for and talks to the child, and the child rewards the adult with a look or smile. The child forms a concept of interaction and the importance of speech. It is very important for the child's development. It is important to support the child's attempts to connect with the parents.

Development in learning a language already starts in the womb and continues throughout early childhood.

Language development is individual. One child says the first words when under one year old, another much later. If a 2-year old cannot form words, it is advisable to discuss about it, for example, in the child welfare clinic.

## **4.2 Supporting language development**

A child is quite good at learning several languages simultaneously. However, it is good to consider which language will be the child's first language and how the parents can support the learning of this language. If two languages are spoken in the family, learning both should be supported.

With the help of the first language the child will learn to understand meanings, to specify feelings, use images and to perceive the surrounding world. Learning is based on the spoken language that the parents use. Therefore, parents must use the most natural language for them, that is, their mother tongue, with the child.

It is important that both parents always use their own language. Even if the child uses one of them when talking to the father or mother, the parent must stick to their own language. If the child does not know a word and says it in the other language, the parent repeats the word in his or her own language. He or she must not emphasise the difference between the languages or the fact that the child did not know the word. Thus the child is not made feel guilty about poor language skills.

Language will develop when the parents talk a lot with the child. They can tell stories, listen, discuss, read books, explain and give examples of how speech is used and for what purpose. The parents must show that they value their own language.

Many parents are concerned if the child will learn Finnish or Swedish. Practice and research show that mastering your own mother tongue is the foundation for learning other languages. The child will not learn Finnish (Swedish) any quicker or better if the parents stop talking in their own language. Giving up your own language can, instead, make it more difficult for the child to learn a language.

It is good for the child to experience other people speaking the parents' mother tongues. In this way the child will understand that a mother tongue is a valuable asset and is spoken by many people.

Being with other children is an efficient way to learn a language. Parents are advised to help and guide the child at the sandbox, in the play park and with hobbies.

### **4.3 Day care in Finland**

There is a working day care system in Finland so parents can go to work or study.

Generally the child's day care is under consideration for the first time when the child is about 9 months old, that is, the period for maternity allowance ends. However, many parents take care of the child at home until 3 years old. Under 3-year olds' childcare is supported by paying child home care allowance. If the parents want, the municipality is obligated to arrange a daycare place for the child. Then the child home care allowance is not paid.

If the child goes to Finnish or Swedish day care, the child's mother tongue development must be supported at home. The family must reserve time for the child so that the child can hear and speak his or her mother tongue.

Teaching the child is not emphasised in day care, but playing and being together is important. The children are encouraged to do things themselves. The child learns to act independently and also in a group.

A child is allowed to be in day care 10 hours a day maximum. Short enough care days, days off and holidays are important to a child. The child must have a chance to rest and relax and spend time with his or her family. Only by being with the child can the parents transfer their own values, language and culture to the child.

The day care staff works in co-operation with the parents. You can discuss with them any questions connected to the children. When necessary the day care centre works in co-operation with the welfare clinic, doctor, psychologist and speech therapist.

The day care centre staff gives all the necessary information about the care times, fees, practical matters and clothing the child needs. In the daycare centre children will be out regardless of the weather, so the child must have waterproof clothing for rainy weather and sufficient change of clothing.

### **4.4 Playing is a child's work**

Some parents might think that a child should study more and play less. From the point of learning, playing is, however, the most important thing for a child. All the skills the child needs in the daycare centre, school and future life will be learnt and practised when playing.

Playing develops imagination, helps to concentrate on, and puts one's heart and soul into, different situations. Playing teaches flexibility and the ability to plan. Playing also teaches to overcome disappointments and wait one's turn.

An important skill is also to talk to, agree with and plan together with other children. While playing a child can practise different life roles.



## **4.5. Child between two cultures**

A child's position between two cultures may sometimes feel difficult. Then he or she needs the parents' support.

The child starts to assimilate with Finnish children early. It may be difficult to associate his or her new experiences with the parents' culture. The child needs information and support so that he or she can be proud of his or her own culture. He or she needs concrete matters connecting him or her with other people with the same cultural background. It is important for the child to have a feeling that he or she belongs to something.

The environment's attitudes have a great importance. If the daycare centre, school and friends accept the child's cultural background, he or she has good chances to grow into a citizen of two cultures. The parents' task is to offer the daycare centre and school information about the child's cultural background.

The child may sometimes want to reject his or her own cultural background. He or she might refuse to speak his or her mother tongue and be ashamed, if the parents speak it in public. The child might be ashamed of his or her own origin and is drawn even stronger to the Finnish culture. It might offend the parents.

Such situations require plenty of patience and understanding from the parents. The parents should know that the child's behaviour is not insulting their origin. A joint discussion in the family will clarify the situation.

A child may also have a negative attitude towards immigrating to a new country. This is the case especially if friends, hobbies and language skills are left behind in the native country. Parents must listen to the child and explain the reasons for immigrating, so the child can understand and accept it. On the other hand the child must have a chance to mourn his or her own losses.

## **5 Child in school**

### **5.1 School starts at 6 years of age**

Generally a child starts school when 6 years old in pre-school instruction. The child receives pre-school instruction in the school or daycare centre for about four hours a day. The pre-school instruction is free of charge. Its aim is to prepare the child for attending school.

If a child needs daycare after pre-school, it can be arranged, but a fee will be charged.

Compulsory education starts the year a child turns 7. The parents register the child in a school. Information will be sent to the parents concerning when and where they can do it. Generally, the child attends the closest

school, but the parents can also choose another school. Compulsory education lasts until 16 years of age or the end of basic education.

If a child started school abroad, he or she attends the class with same-age children in Finland. The parents register the child at school. It is good to discuss about the child's language skills and studies in the other country at the same time. If the language skills are insufficient for studying in Finnish or Swedish, the child can be placed in a preparatory class. There he or she will learn Finnish or Swedish and other school subjects needed. When the language skills improve, the child will be transferred to a regular class.

The differences in children's learning might be big especially during the lower grades. Each child learns to read and write at his or her own pace during the first two years. At the lower grades the advancement is evaluated in writing. At the upper grades evaluation is done by numbers.

Sufficient Finnish or Swedish language skills are the requirement for the child to be able to follow the instruction. Skills in the mother tongue are the best guarantee for learning a second language. Parents can support the development of the child's language skills by talking, discussing, playing and spending time with the children.

Schools follow the curriculum drawn up by the Finnish National Board of Education. The parents receive information about the curriculum and other matters to do with instruction, for example, in the school's parents' evenings and from teachers.

Each class has a homeroom teacher who also teaches nearly all the subjects in the lower grades. The homeroom teacher is the contact between the home and school. He or she can be contacted during office hours on all matters concerning the child. Generally the homeroom teachers inform when and at what number they can be reached.

Discussions between the homeroom teacher and the parents are an important part of the co-operation between the home and school.

## **5.2 Special needs instruction**

If a child needs special support in studying he or she can be placed in special needs instruction. A child may have, for example, some disability, illness or emotional problems, which makes studying harder in a regular class.

There are very different special classes. The common factor is that the special class has just a few pupils. A personal plan is made for the pupil to arrange the instruction (HOJKS). In special needs instruction the child studies in ways that suit him or her. The child gets various kinds of help and support for studying.

The arrangements for special needs instruction are agreed on with parents and the party who cared for or examined the child. Sometimes a pupil who needs special support can be placed in a regular class, but he or she will receive the necessary support measures.

All schools have a pupil care group, which aims to advance the children's wellbeing and studying. The group draws up a plan with the parents for the necessary support measures. The group includes a school social worker, psychologist, headmaster, public health nurse and teachers. The parents can take part in meetings where matters concerning their child are handled.

### **5.3 School attention and hobbies**

A child needs sensible things to do. It is the parents' job to guide the child towards good hobbies.

At the lower levels the child often goes to an afternoon club or other after school care. The afternoon care is not part of the instruction and there is usually a fee.

There are hobby clubs in many schools after the school day. The schools inform about the clubs in autumn. There are things to do and hobbies also in sports clubs, societies, youth centres or in your own neighbourhood. Talk to your child about what interests him or her.

Hobbies usually cost money, but prices are reasonable. The parents have to often take care of transporting the children to and from hobbies.

Hobbies should not tire the child too much. The child must cope in school, meet friends, go out, rest and spend time with the family. It is also important for the child to have time to him or herself. A good hobby that they like once or twice a week is enough for a small pupil.

## **6 Challenges of immigration and puberty**

### **6.1 Between childhood and adulthood**

Puberty means the time between about 10 and 18 years. The adolescent then experiences the change between childhood and adulthood. Puberty is often a confusing time for the adolescent. Many changes happen in one's body.

The adolescent evaluates him or herself and compares to others of the same age. Many an adolescent feels that he or she is different or imperfect. They might feel uncertain, and the feelings may often change. The adolescent cannot always explain what is wrong or why he or she feels all confused.

In puberty the adolescent starts to assume responsibility for his or her life and pull away from parents. He or she likes to spend time in the company of people the same age. In puberty there is plenty of rebellion and resistance.

For an immigrant adolescent becoming a man or a woman means new choices: he or she may have to fit together the male or female ideals of two different cultures.

## **6.2 As a parent of an adolescent at puberty**

Parents may sometimes have difficulty understanding an adolescent at puberty. The adolescence of the parents in another country may have been quite different. The life values in Finland may be very different. It is part of the adolescent's life to question the views of the parents.

Parents have to decide what, how and when they tell the adolescent about sexuality and becoming an adult. The schools give sex education, but the parents also have to tell about things connected with sexuality.

Moving from lower secondary level, that is, 6<sup>th</sup> grade to the upper secondary level coincides with puberty. The adolescent has to adjust to new classmates and teachers and learn to study more independently. It is not an easy task for an adolescent going through puberty.

The adolescent pupil may not always understand that studying is important for his or her whole future. Therefore, it is important to support and follow studying, just as the co-operation between teachers and parents is important until the end of the school.

## **6.3 Who is responsible?**

Practicing responsibility is important for adulthood. The parents help the adolescent to practise responsibility. Parents, however, set the boundaries.

The adolescent wants to test his or her boundaries, he or she may try smoking, using intoxicants or being out late. The adolescent may hide things from parents, including what he or she does.

Discussions with the adolescent, telling about one's own values and setting boundaries help the young to understand the responsibilities and duties connected to growing up.

Sexuality is also part of the mutual relationships of the adolescents. The school friend can suddenly look like a potential dating partner. Crushes, getting hurt, disappointments and secrets are part of adolescent life.

Simply: an adolescent wants to know about life. It happens safely when parents act as teachers of life.

## **7 Immigration and an independent adolescent**

An adolescent growing up has many choices in front of him or her: choosing an occupation, finding a place to study, moving away from home, having a relationship with someone and serving in the armed forces. The future may even feel frightening. The parents are needed to support the adolescent to become independent.

Every adolescent matures into independence at his or her own pace. Some need the safety of home longer than others; some may have to be encouraged to leave home. Also the support of the family, relatives and grandparents can be important and valuable. Sometimes an adolescent respects the grandparents' opinions more than his or her parents.

In Finland adolescents often leave the family earlier than in many other cultures. The Finnish adolescent wants to live in his or her own way and no longer listen to the parents' wishes. Sometimes conflicts can lead to the adolescent moving out of the home. Generally the adolescent successfully leaves the home with the co-operation of adolescent and parents.

If the parents acquiesce to living in their own home on the adolescent's terms, they may make it more difficult for the adolescent to become independent. A parent must not stay 'attached' to the child nor make the adolescent feel guilty about the parents being left alone.

Part of growing up is wanting to be responsible for oneself and one's life. The parents' task is to let the adolescent break away and trust in his or her ability to manage. If the parents continuously interfere in the adolescent's life, they show that they do not trust the adolescent to cope.

It is perhaps especially difficult for immigrant parents to give up their child and let him or her become an independent adult. The parents may have wishes and expectations that may differ from those of the adolescent.

Young adults lead a rather independent life in Finland. The bond between parents and adolescents is often not as close as the immigrant parent may wish.

However, it is good to know that integration into a new country can be very successful. Immigration can enrich the family's life and offer new opportunities.

## **8 Where to get support and information**

Services and support for families are provided by municipal social workers and immigration workers, as well as many associations and organisations.

This guide was written by Väestöliitto Kotipuu (Family Federation Home Tree) unit.

Väestöliitto Kotipuu is a know-how and resource centre dealing with questions concerning immigrant family life, child upbringing and parenthood. The family is an important resource from the aspect of immigrant integration. Breaking up social relations, quick cultural change and a new language challenge the families' wellbeing.

Please visit our web site on the Internet and familiarise yourself with how we support families that have immigrated to Finland.

[www.vaestoliitto.fi](http://www.vaestoliitto.fi) > Multicultural Activities (monikulttuurisuus)

More information for immigrants can be found at the following Internet links:

[www.infopankki.fi](http://www.infopankki.fi)

[www.selma-net.fi](http://www.selma-net.fi)