



BLACK LEGAL
ACTION CENTRE

EMPOWERMENT TIPS

for Black LGBTQ+ Newcomers in Canada

05

Community Spaces
(Public, Policing, and Services)

Introduction

This tip sheet was developed as part of the **Black LGBTQ+ Newcomer Leadership and Capacity-Building Project**, a four-week workshop series that brought together community members to share lived experiences, name systemic barriers, and design practical solutions for safer, more inclusive services in Ontario. The project was made possible through the support of the **Black Legal Action Centre (BLAC)**, whose dedication to fighting anti-Black racism and advancing racial justice has ensured that the voices of Black LGBTQ+ newcomers are centred and amplified.

This guide helps Black LGBTQ+ newcomers learn their rights and take action against discrimination. It covers:



Each section has advice on **“Know Your Rights,” “Your Responsibilities,” “Steps You Can Take,” “Support Services to Contact,”** and example **“Language You Can Use”** to speak up.



Disclaimer

The information provided in this tip sheet is intended to help you understand your rights and offer guidance in common situations. It is not legal advice and should not be relied upon as a substitute for professional legal or medical counsel.

If you need specific advice or support, please contact a lawyer, healthcare provider, or relevant professional. Every situation is unique, and the steps you take may depend on the details of your case.

This tip sheet is designed to empower you with knowledge and is meant to be a tool to assist you in navigating difficult situations. Always seek personalized support when needed.

Understanding Your Rights and Laws

- **Know your rights:** Take time to learn about protections under the **Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms** and the **Ontario Human Rights Code** (e.g., protections against discrimination based on race, gender, sexual orientation, and gender identity/expression).
- **Stay informed about laws:** Be aware of federal, provincial, and municipal laws. For example:
 - **Federal laws:** immigration requirements, criminal code.
 - **Provincial laws:** employment standards, tenancy laws, health coverage rules.
 - **Municipal by-laws:** noise, smoking, recycling, pet ownership.
- **Understand your immigration process:** Refugee claimants and newcomers are responsible for following Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) rules, attending appointments, and submitting truthful information.
- **Respect community rules and norms:** In community spaces, this includes respecting others' safety and dignity, not harassing others, and following posted guidelines.
- **Seek reliable information:** Do not rely solely on word-of-mouth or social media. Always confirm rules and rights with trusted organizations (e.g., The 519, settlement agencies, legal clinics).
- **Ask questions:** If you don't understand your rights or responsibilities, it's your duty to ask for clarification from a service provider, lawyer, or official agency.



Community Spaces

Everyone has the right to be safe and respected in public. These tips guide you in responding to harassment or exclusion.

Know Your Rights

You have the right to be safe and respected in public places. For example, if someone shouts homophobic or racist slurs at you on the street, that could be a hate-motivated incident. Such behaviour may break laws (like causing a disturbance or hate crime laws). You do not have to accept harassment from strangers, it's not your fault. Also, any public service (libraries, public transit, government offices, community programs) must serve you without discrimination under human rights laws. For instance, a community centre or clinic cannot refuse you service because you're trans or of a certain race.

You also have rights when dealing with police. Racial profiling and biased policing are illegal. The Ontario Human Rights Commission emphasizes that racial profiling by law enforcement violates the law. Police officers should not stop, search or treat you differently just because you're Black or LGBTQ+. (If they do, that's discrimination.) You generally have the right to walk away if an officer stops you without a clear reason ("Am I free to go?" is your question). You have the right to remain silent and only give your name or ID if you have to (for example, if driving or if under lawful arrest). You can also legally record police in public for your protection, as long as you don't physically interfere. Remember, using the word "sir/ma'am" or staying calm and keeping hands visible can help defuse a police stop.

You have the right to use the public washroom that matches your gender identity. Many places also offer all-gender washrooms if you prefer. If someone in public harasses you for this, it's on them, not on you. And if you experience a hate incident (verbal or physical) because you're Black or LGBTQ+, you can report it to police or to community groups; these incidents are taken more seriously as hate crimes.

Find out more:

- Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) – Rights in public spaces and services.
 - ohrc.on.ca/en

Your Responsibilities

- **Respect shared spaces:** Follow rules in community centres, libraries, and on transit.
- **Be considerate:** Keep behaviour respectful; avoid actions that disturb others' safety or comfort.
- **Follow by-laws:** Know and obey local rules (noise, smoking, waste disposal).
- **Engage positively:** Volunteer, attend programs, and support cultural or community events.
- **Keep spaces clean:** Dispose of trash properly and care for public areas.
- **Respect diversity:** Treat all community members with dignity and fairness.
- **Report incidents:** Tell staff or authorities if you experience or witness hate, harassment, or violence.
- **Avoid conflict:** Seek peaceful solutions; ask staff or mediators for support if needed.
- **Be safe:** Follow emergency instructions in public buildings or transit systems.



Steps You Can Take

If harassed in public: First, trust your gut. If someone is shouting slurs at you, move to a safer area (go into a store, cross the street) or call out loudly, "Please stop harassing me." If you're on transit and feel threatened, ask the driver to stop at a safe place. If you feel in immediate danger, call 9-1-1 and say you are being harassed. After the incident, consider reporting it to the police (especially if it was violent or a hate crime) or to a hate crime hotline if available (some provinces have them). You can also tell a friend or community member and get emotional support.

If harassed by a public service worker: Let's say a clerk or guard is rude or discriminatory. You can politely ask to speak to a supervisor: "I am not comfortable with how I'm being treated. May I speak to a manager?" Explain the situation calmly. For example: "I feel you're not serving me because I'm [trans/Black], and that's unfair." Many organizations have complaint procedures and will take it seriously when a manager is involved. If they still won't help, note the person's name and report the complaint to their department later.

Police encounters: If a police officer stops you, stay calm. Ask if you are being detained: "Officer, am I free to go?" If they say yes, politely walk away. If not, ask why: "What is the reason for this stop?" If you feel it's unfair, you can repeat, "I have rights too. Why are you stopping me?" If the officer becomes aggressive or uses slurs, do not resist physically. Afterward, you can file a complaint with the police oversight body (in Ontario, the Law Enforcement Complaints Agency) or a human rights claim. Try to remember badge numbers or patrol car info. You can also say you are recording the interaction: "I'm filming this for my safety." If you have a phone, recording from a distance can protect you. You cannot be arrested just for filming police in public.

In services and community spaces: If anyone denies you access to services (like a restaurant, public washroom or shelter) because you're trans or Black, that's discriminatory. You could calmly say: "I have the right to use this facility" and seek assistance. In many cities, there are volunteer "safety teams" or allies in LGBTQ+ neighborhoods who can help in harassment situations. Some community centers have incident reports for microaggressions. Use them if available.

Steps You Can Take

Use the buddy system: When going out, especially at night or to unfamiliar places, go with a friend. If you feel a place might not be LGBTQ+-friendly, travel in groups or stick to busy areas. Community events (like Pride or Black queer meetups) often have volunteers keeping an eye out for each other.

Report serious incidents: If you are the victim of a hate-motivated assault or a serious hate crime, call 9-1-1 and then consider contacting community victim services. In Ontario, Victim Services Toronto (416-808-7066) and similar agencies across Canada can provide free crisis counseling and help with the justice process. They assist all victims, including LGBTQ+ and racialized persons.

Support Services to Contact

Law Enforcement Complaints Agency (LECA)

Ontario: If you want to file a complaint about police misconduct (any force or abusive language), you can contact LECA online or by phone. Website: leca.ca. Phone: 1-877-411-4773.

Human Rights Legal Support Centre (HRLSC)

They can advise on human rights claims, including cases involving police or public services discrimination. The process is similar to employment and housing complaints. Phone: 1-866-625-5179.

CCLA (Canadian Civil Liberties Association)

They have resources on dealing with police (search “know your rights police CCLA”) and may help in high-profile cases of civil rights abuse.

Local LGBTQ+ centers

Many cities have LGBTQ+ community centers with youth or support lines. They can often refer you to legal clinics or community mediators if you face harassment in community spaces.

Hate Crime Hotlines

Some cities/provinces have hotlines to report hate crimes to community organizations (these usually share info with police anonymously). For example, Hamilton’s Hate Crime Hotline or a B.C. provincial line. Check if your region has one.

Trans Lifeline

If you face transphobic harassment or violence and need someone to talk to, Trans Lifeline can help with support (1-877-330-6366).

LGBT YouthLine Ontario

For any LGBTQ+ youth (under 29) feeling unsafe or needing advice, call 1-800-268-9688 or text 647-694-4275.

Victim Services

If you are assaulted or threatened because of hate, provincial victim services agencies (usually called Victim Services) will help with counseling and can connect you with legal resources. Google “[your province] victim services.”

Language You Can Use

Standing up to street harassment:

If a stranger shouts at you, you can loudly respond: "Hey, that's harassment. Stop harassing me!" or even "Leave me alone!" If others are around, use their help: "Can someone assist me? I'm being harassed here."

With police – asking if free to go:

"Officer, am I free to leave? If so, I'd like to go." If they say yes, calmly walk away. If they say no and give a reason, listen and comply to stay safe, then file a complaint later.

Police refusing search:

If they ask to search your bag or car, you can say: "I do not consent to a search. I have the right to refuse without a warrant." Don't physically struggle, but state your refusal clearly so it's on record.

Telling someone to stop harassing you:

"Your comment/behaviour is unacceptable. I deserve to feel safe here. Leave me alone." Saying firmly that you will report them can also deter them.

In a store or office:

If a guard or staff says, "You're not allowed here," calmly reply: "On what basis? I have the same right to be here as anyone else. Please get a supervisor."

After a police encounter:

If you feel racially profiled: "Officer, I feel I was stopped without any reason other than my race. I want to file a complaint about this." (Keep it factual, e.g. "You said you stopped me because I matched a description, but the description was very generic.")

Always keep calm and confident. By speaking up or asserting your presence (even simply staying in the space you have a right to), you challenge bias. You help educate others that Black LGBTQ+ people have every right to public spaces and services. And remember – there are allies and bystanders too. If you notice someone harassing another, stepping in or even making eye contact with a frown can deter them.



Conclusion

These aren't just sections of a tip sheet – they are tools you can carry with you in daily life as you navigate Canada as a Black LGBTQ+ newcomer. You now have concrete examples of how to handle discrimination in housing, healthcare, work, immigration, and public spaces. You have names of laws that protect you (like the Ontario Human Rights Code, Canada Health Act, Occupational Health and Safety Act, etc.) and agencies that can support you (from the Human Rights Legal Support Centre to Black Legal Action Centre to community programs).

Armed with this knowledge, we hope you feel **more confident and empowered** to assert your rights and seek help when needed. Discrimination and bias can be deeply hurtful, but they thrive in silence and ignorance. By knowing how to respond and who to call, you break that silence and challenge the ignorance, not just for yourself, but for others who will come after you.

Keep this tip sheet handy; maybe save it on your phone or in your email. You might not need all of it now, but situations can arise unexpectedly. When they do, take a deep breath, recall these tips, and remember: **you have every right to be here, to be yourself, and to be treated with dignity**. Canada's laws are, in theory, on your side, and there are many people in the community on your side too. You are not alone in facing these battles.

Stay strong, and never hesitate to **stand up for yourself** and also to **reach out for help**. As a Black LGBTQ+ newcomer, you are part of multiple communities; the immigrant community, the Black community, the LGBTQ+ community; and there are allies in all of them ready to fight alongside you. Your existence and success here matter; your rights matter. Welcome to Canada, and may you thrive as your authentic self!

Prepared with contributions from current Canadian laws, community resources, and human rights guidelines to ensure accuracy as of 2025.

Contact Information



The 519 is a Toronto-based 2SLGBTQ+ community centre dedicated to advocacy, service provision, and creating inclusive spaces for queer and trans communities, newcomers, and marginalized groups.

Phone 416-392-6874

Website The519.org

Email Info@The519.org

Address 519 Church St,
Toronto, ON M4Y 2C9



The Black Legal Action Centre (BLAC) is a non-profit community legal clinic in Ontario that provides free legal services to address anti-Black racism and advance the rights and dignity of Black communities.

Phone 416-597-5831

Website blacklegalactioncentre.ca

Email info@blac.clcj.ca

Address 180 Dundas St W unit 1509,
Toronto, ON M5G 1Z8
