

MOVING WITH CHILDREN

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Moving to a new home is an exciting venture, but it can also be very stressful. Adults can feel like they are on an emotional roller coaster during the process, and children do too.

There are several things that we as parents can do for our children to help ease the transition. Communication is a vital key. We need to talk to our children as soon as the decision to move has been made. Children of all age levels need and deserve to know of this change in their lives well in advance. We also need to talk about the move with our children throughout the planning stages and even after the move has been made.

As a parent your attitude is very important. Children can pick up on their parents' anxiety and stress. If you are anticipating the move with enthusiasm, your eagerness will be catchy! That is not to say that you should diminish the importance of your old home or the memories you have there. Children may get the perception that old is "bad" and new is "better". Naturally, some aspects of the new home will be better, but don't promise the moon. Avoid statements like "You'll have more friends". Acknowledge and cherish the times and memories of the old neighborhood while looking forward to new friends and adventures.

The ease of transition is also dependent on the age of your child. Generally, the younger the child, the easier the move can be. As a child gets older he or she sets down more roots. You can expect to have more of a challenge with teens than infants and preschoolers. Following are some key elements and strategies for moving with children of each age group.

Infants, Toddlers and Pre-school

Routine is extremely important at a young age. In the hectic weeks before and during the move, try to adhere to your child's daily schedule as closely as possible.

- Keep scheduled nap times, bedtimes and meals; this is a source of comfort.
- On moving day keep your young child in the car with you with a favorite stuffed animal or blanket.
- Avoid sending your child to Grandma's.

You don't want your child to feel as though he has been "transported" to a strange new place. Also give your child a chance to say goodbye to the house and neighborhood. If you need that extra pair of arms with small children, then have Grandma come with you from the old house to the new. (That extra reassurance may help everyone!)

Upon arrival at your new home, use the same bedroom furniture, bedding and curtains so that there is something familiar in his new room. Try not to start anything new with your child before the move. Avoid transitioning from a crib to a bed at this point; likewise, hold off on weaning and toilet training. Your child may regress in toileting and sleep habits with the change. It's easier to give you and your child ample time to adjust to the new surroundings, and then start something new. Prolonged signs of anxiety or regression such as sleep disturbances, thumbsucking, etc. should be reported to your pediatrician.

Children at this age are very attached to their caregivers. For infants, toddlers, and preschoolers, the change in surroundings has minimal impact on them, as their world is their caregiver. A change in daycare providers may be a major cause of adjustment for your child at this age. Try to maintain the same daycare provider for a time after the move if possible. If a daycare change needs to be made be sure to help your child adjust. Be sure to visit the new facility and meet your child's new caregivers.

Children in School

As children become more involved outside the home and establish friendships, there are more issues involved in the moving process. Friends and school are a large part of your child's day. You may wonder, "Is it better to move during the school year or during the summer vacation?" Sometimes there is no choice, but there are pros and cons for either decision.

If you choose to move during the summer, your child will start a new school year with a new teacher just like his classmates. He can explore and get used to the new neighborhood during the carefree days of summer. Then your child can deal with the transition to the new school. A move during the school year, however, may afford your child more attention. Class routines have been established and as the "new kid" in class your child may receive more attention from the teacher. Your child may be able to meet new friends and participate in clubs and activities that may not be available in the summer. In either case, you should visit the new school with your child to register, tour the school and possibly meet new teachers.

Teens

As with their younger school-age counterparts, teens spend most of their day with friends at school, participating in sports and social activities. Their peer group has much more meaning and impact on their lives. At this age they may have started a romantic relationship. Parents need to work diligently and patiently at keeping the lines of communication open. If your teen doesn't say anything, you cannot assume everything is fine. This may be a signal that he or she is worried and anxious. Your teen may miss his or her friends, teams or jobs. A move threatens their feeling of control and independence, so they may harbor some feelings of resentment. High school seniors need special

consideration. You may need to think of a creative solution that allows your teens to graduate with their friends.

Saying good-bye at this age takes time. It is paramount that you inform your teen immediately of a decision to move. Teenagers have the maturity to understand the move, but may take time to accept them. As a parent it is easy to get defensive and lecture. Try to listen to your teen. Let him or her express his issues and help him deal with it. Make concrete plans to keep in touch with old friends while anticipating new ones. School holidays and vacation time are a great time to plan a get together with a friend from the old neighborhood. Maintain participation in outside activities such as the same music or karate lessons; this helps foster a sense of continuity. Encourage your teen to enroll in sports or community activities in the new neighborhood.

The same issues of timing the move and the school year are also at work here. The summer may be more difficult at this age. Area teens may be involved with their own friends and summer activities and there may be less opportunity to meet or mingle with new friends. Teens can also benefit from a visit to the new school not just to view the campus and meet new teachers, but to see what styles, haircuts and backpacks, are “in” among the student body. Fitting in socially is important to most teens.

The most hectic and stressful time for your family usually falls two weeks prior to and after the moving date. Extra attention needs to be given to not only the details of the move, but the “people” factors as well. Attitude, communication, and planning are vital to the success of a smooth moving experience. Include your children, whatever their age, in the packing and planning. This helps them feel that they are part of the process and they have some control. Don’t forget to have some fun along the way. Packing is hard work! The family is going to need some “down time”. Maintain the family rituals whenever possible. You will need the rest and relaxation of those Saturday pizza and movie nights, and Sunday morning waffles! Continue these family times together in your new home. This lets your child know that home is where the family is!

Above all, be patient with yourselves as parents. You won’t be able to do it all. Resist the urge to unpack everything at once. Unpack the necessities and spend some time together! The adjustment period is different for everyone and may take up to sixteen months! The reality of what has been left behind will set in and the grief and memories will be very real for your children and for you as an adult. That realization may not set in right away but may surface months after the move. Awareness of what you are feeling may help you deal with it. Take time to be with each other, to share thoughts and feelings and to relax a bit.

Resources

Earhart, Carla and Arlene Fulton,
Helping Children Cope: Children & Moving
Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service

Banks, Ann & Nancy Evans,
Goodbye House: A Kid's Guide to Moving,
Harmony Books, N.Y. © 1980

Olkowski, Thomas T. and Lynne Parker,
Moving with Children – A Parent's Guide
Gylantic Publishing Co. Littleton CO © 1993

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