

## Moving to a New Home

**Although moving has become a common event for American families, it is a “moving” experience in more ways than one.**

*No matter how often families change residence, moving brings with it a variety of emotions and situations.*

### ADVENTURE OR CHALLENGE?

One out of five American families moves each year, and most of those moves are within the same community or to a neighboring state.

Moving can be an exciting adventure for families as they look forward to new places, friends, and neighbors. Many families find that the experience of moving often brings them closer.

The general sense of confusion and disorder can make moving both physically and emotionally stressful. While packing, moving, cleaning, and sorting take a toll on energy and attention, short tempers and chaos drain the emotions.

There is also an element of grief. No matter how eager you are to move, there will be places, things, and people you will miss. When moving is brought about by a death, divorce, or job loss, the sense of loss and sadness is more acute.

Sometimes a combination of the exciting prospect of moving and the sense of loss that the same change could bring produces a seesaw of emotions. Many family members experience emotional ups and downs.

Moving is a challenging and difficult experience for a family, especially for children. It is natural, therefore, for parents to be concerned about the effect of the move. Parents often wish to help ease the transition for their children and make moving a positive experience.

When faced with a move, it is important to remember that reactions from children will vary depending on their personality and developmental age.

The personality of the child is important because it influences the time a child may take to adjust to the move. Some children are naturally outgoing and will be able to make friends immediately, while some other children may take months.

Some aspects of the child's personality may tend to get more pronounced. For instance, if your child tends to worry and get nervous, you are likely to see more of this behavior until the child begins to feel more comfortable in the new surroundings. Roller-coaster emotions are not uncommon. One day your child may be thrilled and excited, then blue and depressed the next.

## **AGES AND STAGES**

### **Moving and your infant or toddler**

Generally, infants and toddlers make the transition quite well. They may, however, pick up on your anxiety and stress level and seem particularly fussy and demanding in the few weeks before and immediately after your move. If your child is being cared for by a caregiver other than yourself, he or she may go through a sense of loss and not be able to express it well. Older toddlers who have just begun to understand a few basic household rules—like “Don't climb on the counter tops or scribble on the wall”—may need to relearn the rules all over again in the new house.

#### **What you can do**

Your time and attention are especially important now. Remember to take a break during the rush to hold or play with your child. Be sure to keep any security objects such as a favorite teddy bear or blanket close by. Keep your routine as normal as possible. Regular eating and nap times are important.

### **Moving and your preschooler**

Often, preschoolers will express a great deal of excitement over a move, but they may not really understand everything that is going on. The details of moving inevitably frustrate

parents, and preschoolers tend to think that the chaos and frustration may somehow be their fault.

Preschoolers also find it hard to understand what will go with them and what will stay behind. They may not realize that you are taking furniture and toys with you, and they often develop great fears for their personal belongings and toys. Also, they may not realize that close friends, relatives, and neighbors will not make the move.

#### **What you can do**

Try to pack children's things last and include your preschooler in on the packing process. Don't assume that your child understands the process of moving. Explain the move to your child and give reasons for the way you are doing things. Children's books on moving are listed in this publication. Take the time to read one or two aloud to help your child understand the moving process. As with infants and toddlers, keep your routine as normal and predictable as possible.

### **Moving and your school-age child**

School-age children often are quite excited about a family move and love to become involved in the planning process. School-age children love to develop lists and are very project oriented. Use their enthusiasm and energy to help you get some of your moving tasks done.

Relationships with peers are very important for school-age children, and they can understand the effect of the move on their relationships with friends and neighbors. Although they can understand the separation from friends and neighbors that is about to happen, they may not have the maturity to deal with their emotions.

Most school-age children are quite positive before and even immediately after the move. A month or so after the move, however, they may become quite angry about the move, especially if they have not had much success forming a group of friends. School-age children still have a very active imagination and may have imagined that the move would somehow make their lives wonderful. When reality sets in, therefore, they may experience a great deal of confusion, frustration, and anger.

#### **What you can do**

Scope out the neighborhood before you move. Are there other children your child can play with? If not, where can your child go to meet friends? Is there a community center or club such as 4-H, Scouts, or Camp Fire nearby?

Arrange to visit the school before enrolling your child. Be sure to point out familiar places like the school cafeteria, library, and restrooms. Kids worry about being able to find their way around.

Take pictures of your child, new home, and community and encourage your child to share them with others. A farewell party is also a good idea. A farewell party can help ease the pain of goodbyes, make the move a concrete event, and help the child accept reality.

### **Moving and your teenager**

No doubt about it, moving is difficult for most adolescents. Teenagers are generally very involved in social relationships. Your teen is focused on learning how to develop more long-term relationships. Most teens feel that friendships and romantic relationships are unnecessarily interrupted by a move. Although teenagers have the maturity to

understand reasons for moving, they may not be prepared emotionally.

### **What you can do**

Parents need to give teens time and space when preparing for a move. Many parents postpone telling kids about the move, hoping that it will make things easier. Generally, it is best to tell them right away. The “grief work” of breaking relationships and saying goodbyes takes time and is best done before the move.

Even though teens seem much more advanced in their social skills, they may worry a lot about making friends and fitting in. Be sure to visit their school and check out local activities and employment opportunities for young people.

Communities have their own culture and way of doing things, and this is often reflected in the way teens dress. How they look is very important to teens. Before spending money on a new school wardrobe, you and your teen may want to do some quiet observation or visiting with neighbors to see what others are wearing or doing. Purchasing one or two items of new clothing can often help a teen feel more comfortable.

Parents also can help teens by paying sincere attention to their feelings. Accept your teen’s feelings without getting defensive or lecturing. If a teen can express feelings openly and work through the “sense of loss” with

parental support, he or she will be much less likely to express anger and depression in a harmful manner.

Technology can help. Teens can use their technology skills to research and learn about their new community. They can also use technology to keep in touch with friends on a regular basis. Help children practice new ways of communicating with friends before the big move.

### **How long will your child take to adjust to the move?**

Researchers tell us that adults and children need time to adjust—often as long as 16 to 24 months. For some families, the most stressful time is two weeks before and two weeks after the move. For many families, however, the time of the move is one when everyone pitches in and works together as a team. It is only a month or so after the move that the reality of friends and places left behind begins to sink in. Frustration, anger, and confusion are common emotions at this time. Moving is stressful for adults and is particularly stressful for children as they have limited coping skills.

Other events associated with the move affect how children cope with a move. Financial problems, a death, or a divorce can sometimes make the problem worse and children’s coping skills are stretched to the limit. Parents may then wish to seek short-

term counseling for their children.

### **Focus on the positives.**

Remember that there are many advantages to moving, especially if it is to another community. It opens the mind to new ideas and perspectives. It provides unique opportunities for problem-solving and handling new situations. Handled well, moving can be character building. It can teach children self-awareness and resilience.

## **STRATEGIES TO HELP CHILDREN ADJUST**

**Cherish the memories.** Encourage children to help you make a scrapbook of memories. Take photos and videos of your existing home, favorite places, and friends.

**Be understanding.** Acknowledge both positive and negative feelings. Let children know that it’s normal to feel both excited and anxious. Watch out for verbal and nonverbal communication.

**Encourage questions.** Let children know that it’s okay to ask anything. Often they have worries or concerns that we might not expect. Moving is a process and questions will shift and change. Keep checking in with them and take time to listen.

**Provide continuity.** Much of the stress associated with moving comes from the “newness” and “difference” of things. Try to keep routines and other daily living habits as normal as possible. This is not the time to make a lot of major changes in your family life.

**Hang on to the comfortable and familiar.** With so much change, it may be best to keep that squeaky chair and blanket that is frayed around the edges for a while. Be thoughtful and intentional before tossing familiar items.



**Take steps to build a sense of belonging.** Remind children that you are a family and they are not alone. Home is not just a place, but where your family is. You are experiencing this new adventure together. Make a verbal family commitment to support each other.

**Be patient.** New adjustments take time. Individuals handle things differently. Some children will ease into a new situation; some will dive in head first. Allow for personality differences.

**Take time for final goodbyes.** In the final chaos of moving, it is easy to forget the importance of saying a goodbye to your old home and neighborhood. Give children the opportunity for a final walk through the house before leaving. A brief drive through the neighborhood can also provide some closure.

**Promote peer interaction and new friendships.** Hook into the community quickly. Ask a neighbor if he or she will introduce your child to neighborhood children. Teach children the skills they need to develop new friendships. Link up with familiar organizations such as Scouts, Camp Fire, 4-H, and church youth groups.

**Be a good model.** Children need to see and hear adults express their feelings and work through problems. A parent who feels comfortable with saying “Gee, sometimes I sure feel lonely” or “Today I told myself that I was going to meet at least one new person” can provide a lot of support for children.

Use children’s literature. Books can help children prepare for and understand difficult situations. Story characters who model successful coping strategies are an excellent resource for children.

## CHILDREN’S BOOKS ABOUT MOVING

### Preschool

- *Berenstain Bears’ Moving Day*—Stan and Jan Berenstain
- *Who Will Be My Friends?*—Syd Hoff
- *Boomers Big Day*—Constance W. McGeorge
- *Mitchell Is Moving*—M. W. Sharmat
- *The Quilt Story*—Tony Johnston, Tomie dePaola
- *We Are Moving*—Mercer Mayer
- *Moving Day*—Jess Stockham
- *How to Be a Friend*—Laurie Krasny Brown and Marc Brown

### School-age through preteen

- *Alexander, Who’s Not (Do You Hear Me? I Mean It!) Going to Move*—Judith Viorst, Ray Cruz, Robin Preiss Glasser
- *Hey New Kid*—Betsy Duffey
- *The Kid in the Red Jacket*—Barbara Park
- *I Move A Lot and That’s Okay*—Shermaine Perry-Knights
- *Evelyn Del Rey Is Moving Away*—Meg Medina, Sonia Sánchez



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