

KIDS AND MOVING How To Reduce The Trauma Of Relocating

Here's How To Reduce The Trauma Your Kids Experience When You Move

Nothing is more frightening to a child than the unknown. That's why "moving away" can be a scary thought. Trips before have been to the supermarket to school, to a friend's home – and back. There's a sense of security knowing the day ends at home. Leaving home forever is inconceivable.

That's why relocation can be traumatic to a child. But it doesn't have to be. With your help, moving can instead be a delightful new experience, even adventure. And if your child's attitude is one of eager anticipation rather than fear, relocating will be a lot easier for you, too.

A child who dreads change and lacks experience with good-byes, one who doesn't understand even the basics of moving – thinking, for instance, that favorite possessions will be left behind or that the old house will be towed to a new location!- may exhibit tears and tantrums, resistance or withdrawal. And somewhat older children are likely to worry long and hard about starting over at a new school and finding new friends. For all children on the move, including yours, we present this survival guide.

What All Parents Need To Know To Help Their Kids Survive A Move

Kids can get lost in the shuffle during a relocation. Parents are, understandably, involved in the details of the move-perhaps selling one house and buying another, determining what to pack and what to discard, arranging for the transfer of medical and school records, and countless other responsibilities that go along with moving the family to a new town.

Even when it seems you've got less time than ever, it's important to carve out time to give children the emotional support they need during a time of transitions. Here are some strategies:

Explain The ABC's Of Moving

One of the best ways to overcome children's fears is open communication from the start. Young children have no idea what it means to move. Let them know why, and when and where you are moving as soon as your decision is final.

It's helpful to take them on a visual tour of the new area. When you break the news about the move, have on hand maps, brochures, videos, photographs and information about the new area. Tell them about recreation areas, places of special interest to children, schools, etc. If possible, bring children along on the house hunting trip or on a pre-move visit so they can see what to expect. Plan a school visit. If a pre-move visit

with children is not possible, take photos of the new home, neighborhood, school, playground to show them upon your return.

Stay Upbeat

Children tend to mirror their parents' emotions. If you're happy, they'll be happy. Make sure you schedule family time, such as a walk or dinner out with the family so the kids don't feel forgotten.

Listen carefully to their concerns and respond honestly. Negative reactions to moving are common. Accept any negative feelings and be honest about any doubts you are having, too, while reassuring the child everything will turn out all right. They may be calmed by realizing how "normal" a part of life moving is. Look for age-appropriate books on moving in the library or bookstore and share them with your children.

Involve Them In Planning And Packing Their Stuff

To a small child, the world is made up of possessions. It's "my house, my yard, my tree, my room, my teddy bear." Assure children most of their world is moving, too.

Have children pack as much of their own stuff as possible – even preschoolers can help. Give them special boxes to pack favorite things in. Label the boxes, "Jamie's stuff." Remind them: when the family gets to the new home, all their things in boxes will go right into their new rooms.

Also, enlist their help in making decisions about what to pack and what to donate or discard. Talk about how they'd like their new room decorated.

Saying good-bye

Children, like adults, need closure. Help them prepare to move by creating a memory book. Take pictures of friends, favorite places, and family members in favorite rooms or your home. Help your child create a scrapbook to remind them of the "old" home. Include addresses and phone numbers of friends in the book.

Together, plan a going-away party. Make cards with the new address of the new home to hand out to friends at the party. Invite them to visit when they can. Reassure your children they will be able to call their old friends, even exchange letters or home videos. If visits to the old hometown will be possible, let your children know they'll be able to visit their old friends.

When You First Get There

When the family reaches the new home set up the children's rooms right off the bat. Open the cartons with their stuff and make them feel at home before they have a chance to feel "lost."

Try to keep their schedules as normal as possible. That way, you'll help give them the extra security they need in the new surroundings. Be available at mealtime, bedtime or (if possible) after school to listen and to share in your child's new experiences.

To help them adapt quickly, call on new neighbors to find other children who live nearby. Invite new friends and neighbors to visit. Consider signing up for one or two activities-sports or lessons-to help your child meet new friends and continue special interests. Look to after school sports or clubs, community centers, religious activities, local parks programs, etc.

If the school is dramatically different from the old school, immediately seek academic tutoring and give your child much encouragement and praise. Maintain family time. Explore the new area and include points of special interest to your children.

Relax!

Kids are fairly resilient, even if it seems at first they'll never forgive you for moving. In time, most likely they will, often even sooner than you'd expect. Moving jitters may cause behavior changes which will, after a while disappear as children find a new sense of "home." Be open to the idea of getting professional help, however, if you feel it's needed.

It's not always easy for parents, themselves under moving stress, to respond with infinite patience and warmth. But experience shows the best efforts are rewarded with the children who are contented in their new home-certainly one of the relocation goals of all parents.

FIVE WAYS TO MAKE TRAVELLING EASY

Here are tips for keeping kids happy on the trip from the old home to new:

- 1.)**Pack Snacks.** The easier to serve, the better. Best bets: Juice boxes, raisins, granola bars, animal crackers, prepackaged cheese and crackers.
- 2.)**Stop Often.** Kids cooped up in a car quickly become crabby. Plan time to stretch every 1 to 2 hours.
- 3.)**Map Sidetrips.** If travelling by car, allow time to squeeze in fun for the kids. Look for roadside attractions, amusement parks, lakes or oceans, etc.
- 4.)**Buy Games.** Invest in age-appropriate travel games and toys to ward off boredom. Keep them secret until travel time so the novelty will make them more interesting.
- 5.)**Take Tapes.** A tape player with a headset, plus new tapes, can soothe tired kids.

HOW TO HELP YOUR CHILD SETTLE IN AT SCHOOL

Getting off to a good start in a new school is important both academically and socially. The best way to help children start well is to register before school starts, if possible, to be sure any curriculum problems can be ironed out.

For children with special needs, or those coming from gifted or other special programs or magnet schools, communication with the school administration should start as early as possible by mail or while visiting the destination area on a house-hunting trip. Especially if the move is during the school year, parents should check back with the school and monitor their children's work to be sure they're adjusting well and are in the correct levels of classes.

A good social adjustment at the start can be just as important as academic adjustment, especially among preteens. Teachers may assign a buddy for the new child. Parents can help by making a point of finding at least one schoolmate for their child and arranging a meeting before starting school.

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