

Moving and Children

Moving has become a common feature of the American way of life. Statistics indicate that one out of six families moves every year. Many of these families are "old hands" at relocating; others will be moving this year for the first and perhaps only time.

But whether a family is a veteran or a rookie in the moving process, one aspect of moving that is frequently overlooked or left to chance is the effect relocation will have on children.

Many factors contribute to how a child reacts to a move. Here is a brief look into some of them.

reasons why we move

If you as parents view the change as the fulfillment of some hope or ambition, the feeling you will transmit to those around you will be a happy one. You will meet the inconvenience of relocating with an optimistic outlook.

On the other hand, if the move is associated with disappointment or grief, you and your children will be unintentionally left to fend for themselves in a situation they probably do not understand.



But regardless of the motivation for your move, attention to children's feelings is very important. Which leads to the second factor:

Talking with us Kids

Talking with your children about the move is a matter of top priority. Explain to each child at his own level of understanding why you are moving, what the new home will be like, and how each of them can contribute to the success of the family's relocation.

Encourage them to express whatever feelings they have on the subject. Accept their attitudes, even if they are negative, and discuss with them your own feelings. Remember that you probably have some misgivings about leaving, too, no matter how nice your new situation promises to be.

Above all, be honest. Truth will go a lot further than pretense or made-up stories in preparing children for the move. And remember that the strength of the family as a unit will contribute immeasurably to the readiness and confidence with which the children adapt to their new surroundings.

our last move

If children have moved before, the current move will probably recall memories of feelings they experienced during previous moves. If the feelings were not pleasant, the child may exhibit signs of depression, withdrawn behaviour, or tantrums as the pending moving day nears. Watch for these signs, and when dealing with them remember that the child himself may not fully understand the reasons for his behavior.

For children who have not moved before, this experience may be their first with giving up the known



for the unknown. While they may seem to accept the move well, understand that their need for reassurance and security is high.

1, 2, 4, 7, 6 is how old I am

Each child because of differences in age and life-experience will view the move differently. An infant, of course, will be least affected. As long as he is comfortable and his normal routine isn't disrupted too much, he won't be concerned.

But the pre-school child can pose a real problem. His sense of identity relies on his parents, the family routine, and several objects that are special to him. When he sees his favorite toys being packed and put away, his crib being dismantled, and his mother rushing about with apparently little time to spend with him, he begins to worry. One of his greatest fears is that he will be left behind.

The temptation may be great to send your preschooler to a babysitter during the move, but he will feel a lot better if you let him stay with you. Let him pack and tote along some of his special possessions (do not discard any of them before the move, no matter how old and tattered they are).

The grade school-age child has a more highly developed sense of self since his world extends beyond the family circle. His developing sense of discovery may make the idea of moving exciting to him. While he will be leaving friends, they will not be the deep, vital friendships of older children. The expressed concerns of a grade schooler usually deal with how well he will fit into where he is going.

The teenager, of course, usually has enough problems even in a stable environment. Social activities and friends have by this time overshadowed the family as sources of identity. Frank discussion with your teenager may provide clues on how you can



help him without seeming too "pushy." Help him track down organizations and groups in the new area that are involved in activities that interest him. Encourage him to bring new friends to your home, even if the house isn't yet presentable as you might like.

Since school provides a major orientation for children, another important factor is:

when we gonna move?

One of the unfortunate myths about relocation says that school age children should not be moved until summer. Many families have undergone considerable inconvenience just to avoid a school-year move. But a summertime move may cause more problems than it solves.

Since school is a primary source for making friends, a summertime move will place your child in unfamiliar surroundings at a time when his chances for making friends are at a minimum. When school opens in September, he enters the first day chaos as a stranger. The teacher, meanwhile, facing a new class, will not be able to identify his discomfort and need for special attention.

A move during the school year, on the other hand, allows your child to go directly from one social setting into another. He's new, so his classmates - and more important, the teacher - pay attention to him.

Curricula in the elementary grades in particular are flexible enough to allow school transfer with a minimum of academic problems. High school curricula are generally more structured, which might cause some transitional academic difficulties. However, these difficulties would be a problem in September in the case of a summertime move. The uncertain academic drawbacks of relocation during the school year should be weighed against the social problems a summer move is almost certain to cause.



good ideas!

Bear in mind that whatever the reasons behind it, moving will represent a big change for all members of the family. Emotional fatigue and confusion can cause emotions to run high and tempers to run short. Prior preparation will enable your whole family to better handle the stresses that relocation can precipitate.

Here are several ideas for making the transition as smooth as possible for your children:

- Include the children in making plans for the move. For example, take them with you, if possible, when you go hunting for your new house or apartment.
- If you are moving to a distant place, help your children learn about the new area. Moving companies, the local chamber of commerce, tourist bureaus, and state agencies are possible sources of information.
- By using dolls, boxes, and a wagon, children can get a feeling for the concept of moving through play-acting.
- Let the children help decide how their new rooms are to be arranged and decorated.
- Take the time to make a last visit to places your family is particularly fond of.
- Encourage the children to exchange addresses with their friends. If practical, give thought to allowing them to have their old friends visit them at the new home.
- A telephone call to an old friend is a low-cost way to relieve post-move depression.
- Prepare a package for each child containing favorite toys, clothing, and snacks. Label it with the child's name.



- Survey your new home for loose steps, low overhangs, and other possible accident-producers. Keep your eye on the children until they become familiar with the new home's peculiarities.
 - Take a break with the family as soon as the major unpacking is done. Don't try to do everything as soon as you arrive.
 - Both parents should spend time with all their children after the move, listening to what they've learned about the new school, new friends.
 - The first few weeks in a new school may be difficult for your child. Follow his progress closely, and if any problems increase or don't go away with time, don't hesitate to visit with his teacher. Accompanying him to school the first few days may ease both his and your mind.
 - Younger children may react to the move by reverting to babyish actions. Be reassuring, not scolding. They will soon relax and return to normal behavior.
 - Any abnormalities that linger - particularly physical ones, such as loss of appetite, insomnia, constipation, menstrual disorder - should be referred to a doctor. Point out to them that your family recently relocated.
 - If you are moving to a radically different environment - rural to urban, or vice versa - caution your children about the new situations they will face.
- Even adults find that moving can sometimes be an emotional wrench. How much more so, then, is it likely to be for children, who don't have the maturity, independence, and understanding of a parent. You will move many valuable possessions when you change addresses, but none will be as precious as your children. Give them the attention they deserve and need.

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