

# Tips for Moving with Children

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# Moving With Your Children

## In The Beginning:

### When To Discuss The Move

#### A) Older Children

As soon as you have definite plans, you should tell older children. They need plenty of time to work things through and make their own adjustments. Saying good-bye to friends cannot be rushed. DO NOT SURPRISE THEM. By keeping your move a secret until the last minute, you run the risk that they will hear about it from someone else ... and this could be disastrous.

#### B) Younger Children

It is better NOT to tell young children that you are moving, until activity is underway which actually involves them. A small child cannot fully understand what a move is all about. The longer they have to imagine things in their minds, the more nervous and frightened they may become.

### How To Discuss The Move

First and foremost, your mood will have a huge impact on your child. If your attitude is one of adventure, and if you stay focused on the positive opportunities the move will be creating, this will filter down to your children and help them mentally adjust to the transition. On the other hand, if you are stressed, worried or depressed, your child will pick up on this also and possibly react in a totally negative manner.

There is no greater fear than fear of the unknown. Therefore, give as many details about the move to your child as you feel is necessary. Children need to know why the family is moving and what will be happening during the move. At all times, remain upbeat and excited, particularly if you are discussing the new home and community.

You might want to hold regular “Moving Talks” with the rest of the family. At this time, encourage your children to ask questions and voice their feelings. Almost all children have initial resistance to a disruption of **this magnitude**. Listen attentively, honor their issues and address their concerns in a loving and meaningful way.

### **Especially For Small Children**

A young child will be focused on the present. Therefore, the concept of moving in a few weeks (let alone months) won't mean much to them. They will be immediately running to the window, looking for the moving van, and becoming frustrated when it isn't there yet. Secondly, small children absorb knowledge through fantasy and playing. Try using boxes and a wagon to help them understand the concept of moving. Have your child carefully load up the wagon and then have him or her take the wagon into another room to unload the contents.

You can also introduce your small children to the idea of moving by showing them picture books of other children moving. Make sure you discuss how the people in the book might be feeling. (No matter what the story, always make sure that you end up on a cheery and happy note).

## **Possible Reactions To The Move**

As a parent, it is extremely important that you remain aware of your children's moods during this unsettling time. If a child is not reacting as you might have expected (e.g. unusually disinterested or bored), then it might be a signal of some major internal issues at work. Help them to bring their honest feelings out into the open. Reassure them that it is okay to disagree with you. Once the issues are on the table, then a solution can be worked out.

It is highly likely that ALL children are going to show some degree of frustration, anger, nervousness and sadness over the course of the move ... and for a few months after settling into your new home.

### **Especially For Small Children**

A small child's world revolves around their parents, daily routines and a few special toys. They will have trouble understanding what is moving and what is staying. A child might panic that their toys are staying and, at the same time, expect their best friend to be coming with them. During this transition, they will also worry about being left behind. These fears will probably increase if they see their toys being boxed or their bed dismantled. It is a good idea to pack their room last, and have your child spend time with a favourite relative on moving day.

Basically, small children need to feel protected and secure. Make sure you respond immediately to any little concern, A young child has a tendency to make-up answers in their minds to whatever isn't clearly explained to them. Emphasize that all the family (and pets) will be living together in your new home. Because of their short memory span, you will need to repeat this often.

### **Especially For Elementary-Aged Children**

At this age, moving can be quite exciting. There will be new discoveries to be made, people to meet, and areas to explore. Friendships haven't had a long time to develop and, therefore, are more easily severed than with older children.

These children will be keen on understanding how their everyday routines might change. Are they going to fit in? Who will their new friends be? Will they like their teacher and school? If your child is currently involved in artistic or sport activities, make sure they understand that they can continue with these in the new community.

### **Especially For Teenagers**

Moving will greatly affect your teenager. They might have a part-time job. They have deep friendships. They could be on athletic teams. They attend all sort of social activities.

Avoid generalizing with your teen. They will rebel against platitudes such as 'everything will be fine'. Instead, be open, honest and respectful towards their concerns. Let them know that you want to help find solutions to any problems ... and then make sure that you follow through with any promise. Don't promise anything that you can't deliver. This is a time to develop trust and a bond.

Keep them directly in the "moving picture". Seek their advice and give them a certain level of responsibility and decision-making. Let them know that they are important and that you need their input and feedback.

## Introducing Your New Home:

### Arrange A Sneak Preview

Ideally, you should plan a visit to the new community with your children prior to moving. This will give form to the transition and make it seem more real.

If the house is empty, go inside and let your family check out their rooms. Spend some time mapping out where the furniture will be going. Introduce yourself to any families in the neighborhood.

Check out the restaurants, movie cinemas, sports facilities, parks, playgrounds, shops, etc. If realistic, sign your children up for any extra activities, while they are with you. This way, they will see the facilities, meet the people, and it won't seem so odd and scary later.

Possibly arrange a quick tour of the school(s) your children will be attending. If you know who will be teaching your child, now would be a great time to get acquainted.

## If Your Child Can't Go With You

If your new home is too far away for visits, then it becomes important that you either photograph it or videotape it for your children, when you are there. Take the views out the windows and include the front and back yard. Don't forget to record other sites of interest (schools, shops, restaurants, parks, sports arenas, playgrounds, etc.)

Take pictures of other children the same age as your family. Your own children will want to see what they are wearing, whether they look friendly, where they are hanging out. Later, match all the photos to a map of the neighbourhood, so your child can get some sense of spatial distances.

Make up individual "Care Packs" with gift certificates or coupons to attractions and restaurants that they would each find exciting. Include a special gift from one of the new shops. Let them know what cable stations are available, what music stations kids are listening to, and what movies are currently showing. Build up enthusiasm and excitement.

## Involve Your Children:

### Create A Sense Of Teamwork

Giving your children age-specific jobs will help them to feel involved. For instance, your elementary-age child might love making lists and ticking off jobs as they are completed, while your teenager can assume responsibility in the actual planning. Make sure you emphasize how much their involvement is appreciated. Encourage your family to put forward their thoughts regarding different aspects of the move.

Draw a diagram of each child's bedroom, with their furniture cut to scale, and allow them to start arranging things. Let your children decide on their paint colours, and make sure you then take them with you when shopping for any bedroom decorating item such as paint, wallpaper, bedspreads, etc. This can be an exciting and fun-filled experience and gives your child a feeling of empowerment.

Involve your children with packing the contents of their rooms. Older children can pack all their belongings, while a younger child should be encouraged to pack one box with special toys. (If your small child is worried about the box disappearing, set it aside where it can easily be viewed and then take it with you in the car on moving day). Arrange for each child to personalize the outside of their box(es) by supplying stickers or colored pens. Ask the movers to load these boxes last, so that they will be the first off when the moving van arrives at your new home.

## **Making Life Easier:**

### **Avoid Unnecessary Change**

Try to avoid any changes to your child's daily routine. Normal nap times, play times, meal times, and bedtimes should be maintained, and any additional changes (such as potty training) should be put on hold until several weeks after you have moved into your new house. If you have certain family rituals (such as Friday night pizzas), make sure that you still honor them. Moving is such a big adjustment for a child. Don't add other adjustments on top of it. Children will need the stability of familiar habits.

Even though this seems like a good idea to throw out your child's old toys and clothes, it is better that you hang onto them until after the

move. All these objects, no matter how worn and tattered, can help make the transition from the known into the unknown a lot easier for children.

If possible pack your child's room last. This is their private space and a special place to go when things get too much. Do not pack favourite items or clothing into boxes for the moving van. Instead, take them with you in the car (if possible), so they will never be too far away. If it is feasible, when it comes time to pack your smaller child's room, do so while they are in daycare or out of the house, visiting a neighbor. That way, they aren't part of the final upheaval and you can give them a lot of attention when they return.

## **Saying Goodbye:**

### **Goodbye To the House**

There are a lot of memories in your home. This holds true for your children as well as for yourself. You might wish to consider taking lots of photographs before you begin to dismantle and pack. Have your child create a "Memory Book" and fill it with pictures of the places and people in your neighbourhood that have meant a lot to him or her.

### **Goodbye to Friends**

Of course, saying goodbye to friends and loved ones is going to be the most emotional part of any move. Older Children can hold a party. At this time, they can hand out postcards already stamped and addressed with their new address (nothing like getting a deluge of mail right after the move), have everyone record their contact info and personal note in an album and make sure you videotape the party ... or take lots of photos.



After settling into your new home, make sure you give your children lots of chances to keep in touch with their old friends ... perhaps even give them a special long distance telephone allowance. Arrange for past friends to come and visit, or even schedule a return visit to your previous neighbourhood occasionally.

## **Moving Day:**

Infants and small children are much better off staying with grandparents, aunts or uncles. This will help make the transition go more smoothly and avoid any harm coming to them from getting in the way. They will also be confused as to why you cannot give them their normal level of attention and could end up feeling in the way. If this is not possible, then keep infants safe in a playpen ... along with their favourite toys and consider hiring an older, responsible neighbor to come and play with your younger children and to keep an eye on everyone.

Do not pack your child's favourite toys and books in moving boxes. Instead keep these treasures with you so they will be easily accessible when you arrive at the new home. Also, keep out some games for the car, incase boredom sets in.

Plan to arrive ahead of the movers. This allows time for your children to explore before the rooms are covered in boxes. Make sure you give your child lots of jobs to do as the furniture and contents are being unloaded. Everything is going to seem very strange, and it helps to concentrate on something specific, rather than letting the mind wander.

Remember to try and remain as positive and as calm as possible on this day. Your children will be looking to you for reassurance. Lots of hugs and smiles will go far.

## Settling In:

Upon arrival, take care of your child's room first. This will offer them a feeling of security and act as a base. Quickly set up their furniture and allow your children to unpack their boxes. Encourage them to arrange personal items the way they feel is most pleasing.

Next, check the homesite for anything that might cause a potential accident (wobbly railings and steps, loose window screens, unlocked gates, unprotected swimming pools, etc.). Then establish physical boundaries with your children. Let them know the areas that they are allowed to explore on their own.

Don't try to unpack everything at once. As soon as the essential items have been unearthed, take several "Discovery Breaks". Go for short walks through the new neighbourhood, or hop in the car and check out the closest restaurant or park. Look into activities going on at the local library. Perhaps your new town has a museum or zoo ... or a bike path. Take time to enjoy and absorb the surroundings. Unpack gradually.

As soon as possible, sign your children up for the same activities they had previously been involved in (art, drama, sports, swimming, etc.). This will provide a feeling of continuity and help them to meet others with similar interests.

Invite any neighbourhood children over for pizza or a barbeque.

# Adjusting To The Change:

## What To Expect

Once the excitement of the move has worn off, and you have settled into the new house, reality will sink in for children. This is when frustration and anger might surface as they naturally compare what they left behind (home, friends, school, a job) with what they now need to establish. Each child will adjust differently. Some will fit in right away. For others, it might take a lot longer for the new community to even begin to compare with the old one. This period of transition can take anywhere from a few weeks to more than a year.

## Warning Signs

Although reaction to a move is normal, parents should look for signs that indicate that your child is having an unusual amount of difficulty in adjusting to the new environment. These warning signs can include:

- Becoming more withdrawn
- Having trouble sleeping or having nightmares
- Excessive crying
- Excessive outbursts of anger
- Not wanting to socialize with other children
- Depression
- Wanting to be alone
- Headaches / stomachaches
- Thumb Sucking / bed wetting
- Lack of appetite
- Lower marks in school

If these symptoms persist over a long period of time, or if the symptoms show a sign of increasing, then parents should seek advice from their family doctor or pediatrician.