

Moving With Children

One out of five families move every year. Many of these families are “old hands” at relocating. Others will be moving this year for the first time. In either case, though, one aspect of moving that’s frequently overlooked is the effect it has on children.

Here are some ideas to help make moving as stress-free as possible for your offspring.

Be Positive About the Move

If you view the change as the fulfillment of some hope or ambition, those around you will meet the inconvenience of relocating optimistically as well. On the other hand, if you appear to associate the move with disappointment or grief, your children are likely to react negatively to the experience.

Discuss the Move With Your Children

Talking about the move with your kids is vital. Explain to each child at his or her own level of understanding why you are moving, what their new home will be like, and how each of them can contribute to making the move a smooth one. Encourage them to express how they feel about moving. Accept their attitudes, even if they’re negative, and discuss your own feelings. Don’t be afraid to express any negatives you may have, because it’s important to be honest at this time. Truth will go a lot further than pretense in preparing them for the move. Remember, the strength of your family as a unit will play a major part in determining how your children adapt to their new surroundings.

If your children have moved before, this move will probably recall memories of feelings they experienced during previous moves. If those feelings were not pleasant, your children may exhibit signs of depression, withdrawal or unruly behavior as moving day approaches. Watch for these signs, and try to understand that the children probably don’t know the reason for their own behavior. For children who haven’t moved before, this may be their first experience 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 higher than usual at this time.

Deal With Each Age Level Accordingly

Each child will view the move differently, depending on differences in age and life experience.

Infants will be least affected. As long as they’re comfortable and their normal routine isn’t disrupted too much, they won’t be concern.

Pre-schoolers, on the other hand, can pose a real problem. Their sense of identity relies on their parents, the family routine, and objects that are special to them. When they see their favorite toys being packed, their furniture being dismantled, and mother rushing around with little time for them, they begin to worry. At this age, one

of their greatest fears is being left behind. The temptation may be great to send pre-schoolers to a babysitter during the move, but that will only increase the fear of abandonment. Let them help pack some of their special possessions. Oh, and whatever you do, DON'T discard any of them before the move, no matter how old and tattered they are.

Grade school-age children have a more highly developed sense of self, since their world extends beyond the family circle. Their developing sense of discovery may make the idea of moving exciting. While they may be leaving friends, these will not be the deep, vital friendships of older children. These kids' greatest concern will probably be how well they'll fit in the new neighborhood, school, etc.

Teenagers usually have enough problems, even in a stable environment. Social activities and friends have overshadowed family as sources of identity. While you have to be careful not to seem too "pushy", a frank discussion of their concerns and some suggestions on how to track down information about the new area will be helpful.

When is the Best Time to Move?

A common myth about relocation says that school age children should not be moved until summer. Many families have gone to considerable trouble and expense just to avoid a school-year move. However, a summertime move may cause more problems than it solves. Since school is a primary source of new friends, a summertime move will place the children in unfamiliar surroundings at a time when their chances for making friends are minimal. Then, when school opens in September, they enter on the first day as complete strangers. Teachers, facing new classes, may not be able to identify their discomfort and need for special attention. On the other hand, a move during the school year allows children to go directly from one social setting to another. They're new, so classmates – and their teachers – pay more attention to them. Courses in the elementary grades are flexible enough to allow school transfer with a minimum of academic problems. High school courses vary more from school to school, which might cause some transitional difficulties. However, these difficulties would also be a problem in September in the case of a summertime move.

At any rate, 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.

Tips to Make Your Move Smooth

Whatever the reason behind it, moving will represent a big change for the entire family. 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 crises that relocation can bring on. Here are several ideas for making the transition as smooth as possible for your children:

- Include them in making plans for the move. If possible, take them with you when you go house or apartment hunting.
- If you're moving to a distant area, help your children learn all about it in advance.
- Encourage young children to "play moving," using dolls, boxes, a wagon, etc. It will help them get used to the idea.
- Let your children have as much say as possible on which rooms will be theirs and how they'll be decorated.
- Take the time to make family visits to places that hold fond memories.
- Encourage your children to exchange addresses with the friends their leaving behind. If practical, let them have their special friends visit in your new home. If not, a telephone call is a good substitute.
- Prepare a package for each child, labeled with their name. The package should contain favorite toys, games or music, a change of clothing and snacks. Take it with you instead of putting it on the truck so that there will be something familiar on hand for each child from the moment of arrival.

Text courtesy of the American Moving and Storage Association.