

# **MEN ON THE MOVE**

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## **Make Your Move With Children Easier**

### **Moving and Children**

Moving has become a regular part of American life. Statistics indicate that one out of every six families moves every year. Many of the people quickly become "old hands" at relocation. Yet some will move for the first and maybe even the last time.

Whether families are veteran movers or rookies there is still one aspect of moving that may be frequently overlooked, the effects of moving on children.

There are many factors that contribute to how a child reacts to the family move. Below we detail some of the reasons.

Parents that view moving as fulfilling their hopes or ambitions will in turn relay those feelings to their children. Children will then also begin to view the move in a more positive manner.

If the move is viewed as a negative or associated with grief or disappointment, then those feelings will be picked up and shared by the children. Children will unintentionally be left to fend off the feelings of negativity alone. This is a situation that they will not understand.

Regardless of the reason for the move, paying attention to children's reactions now will be very important.

### **Talk With Your Kids**

Talking with your children about the move is a top priority. Explain to each child on their own level why you are moving, what the new home will be like, and how each child can contribute to the overall success of the move.

Encourage children to express whatever feelings they may have regarding the move. Accept and respect their feelings, even if the attitude is negative. In turn, share your feelings. You may have some misgivings about moving too, no matter how much you may be looking forward to a new environment. Be honest with your feelings. The truth will go much further than any pretenses or made up ideas of what is coming. This will add strength to the family and help to make it a move cohesive unit. It should also help the children to adapt to their new surroundings a little easier.

If your children have moved before, they will recall their old feelings of the experiences they incurred during the last move. If those feelings were positive, that will help in the current situation. However, if their past emotions were negative, you can expect some of those old emotions to resurface. Your child may exhibit withdrawal, moodiness, or tantrums as the moving day approaches. Watch for these signs and keep in mind that your child will most likely not fully understand why they are experiencing their current emotions or why they are exhibiting such behavior.

Children that have not moved before will be experiencing the giving up of the known and familiar with the unfamiliar and the unknown. Even if the child seems to be taking the move in good stride, your reassurances along the way will serve to make their adjustments easier.

### **Your Child's Age**

Your child's age at the time of the move will play into how they adjust to the ideas of moving. A very young child or baby will not show any noticeable differences as long as their daily routine is not disrupted to much.

A pre-schooler on the other hand will generally be a problem. Their sense of identity relies upon family associations and daily routines along with items that are very special to that child. As the child watches their favorite things be packed, their crib or bed being dismantled and mom running about with little time for the child, one of the fears racing through the child's mind is that they may be left behind.

Although you may be tempted to send the preschool child away to a baby sitter, the child will generally feel better if you allow them to stay with you. Let the child help to pack some of his or her things away. Although the temptation to discard things that are old or tattered that belong to the child may be great, you should be cautioned not to do so until after the child is settled into their new surroundings.

Grade school children have a more highly developed sense of self, since their world extends beyond the family circle. This child's sense of discovery may make the move a little more appealing to them. While the child may be leaving their friends, their friendships are not deep vital friendships that older children may experience. Grade school children will generally be more concerned with how they will fit in, in their new surroundings.

Teens usually have problems, even in a stable environment. Their friends and social activities generally overshadow anything else including family as sources of identity. Open and honest discussions with teens will generally provide clues to their feelings and emotions without seeming too pushy. You can help the teen by locating organizations or groups in the new area that may be of interest to the teen. Once the move is complete, encourage your teen to bring new friends to your new home. Don't worry if things are not in complete order, the main thing is to let the child begin to acclimate themselves to their new surrounding and to become a part of them.

### **When Should You Move?**

School plays an extremely important part in your child life. One unfortunate myth about moving is that it should be done during the summer when the child is out of school. This may be very detrimental to the child's adjustment, since school is generally a primary source of making new friends. During the summer months they may not be able to easily find new friends and once school does begin in the fall, they will be entering into a new school as a complete stranger. As such they will tend to feel much more alienated.

Moving during the school year allows the child to immediately begin to socialize and make new friends. The child is new and so will become a focus of attention by students and teachers. Teachers will be able to identify whether the child needs special attention paid to their adjustment needs. This is something that may not occur if the child enters a new school at the beginning of new classes for everyone involved.

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 also be a problem for the child entering the school during the fall if a summer move were made. Uncertain academic drawbacks of relocation during the school year should be weighed against the social problems that a summer move is almost certain to cause.

Always bear in mind that whatever the reasons for your move, they will result in big changes for all family members. Fatigue and confusion can cause emotions to run high and tempers to run short. Good prior preparations will enable all family members to better handle the crisis that relocation may present.

Below are some ideas that can help to make the transition as smooth as possible for all concerned:

- Include children when making plans for your move. An example would be to take them with you when house hunting and allowing their comments to be heard.

- where ever you may be moving to, long or short distance, help your children to learn a little about the new area. Local chambers of commerce, tourist bureaus or local libraries should be able to help provide useful information.
- For younger children, using dolls, boxes and wagons may help them to get a feeling for the concepts of moving through play acting.
- Let your children help to decide how their new rooms will be arranged and decorated.
- Take time to visit places that are of special interest to your family.
- Encourage children to exchange addresses with their friends. If it is practical give thought to allowing their friends to visit them at the new home. Phone calls to old friends are low cost ways to help relieve post move depression.
- Prior to moving day, prepare a package for each child that contains some of their favorite things, including special toys, clothing and snacks. Label it with the child's name to help him or her have something special to call their own during the move and until they can access the rest of their things.
- Survey your new home for loose steps, low overhangs or anything else that may cause an accident. Keep a watchful eye on your children until they become familiar with their new surroundings.
- As soon as major unpacking is done, take a break with the family. Don't try to unpack and get completely settled in at once.
- Parents need to spend time with the children after the move. Listen to what they have to say about new schools, new friends and anything else they want to talk about concerning their new surroundings. Try to act on the negative aspects to reduce their potential and reinforce the positive aspects of what they have to say.
- The first few weeks at the new school may be difficult for your child. Follow their progress closely. If problems linger, don't hesitate to visit with the child's teacher. Accompanying your child to and from school the first few days will also help to set yours and your child's mind at ease.
- Younger children may react to the move by reverting to babyish actions. Be reassuring to the child, not scolding. They are simply adjusting and will soon return to normal behaviors.
- Should any abnormalities linger, particularly physical ones, such as loss of appetite, insomnia, constipation or anything else, be sure to consult a doctor. Be sure to advise the doctor that you have recently moved to help them in their diagnosis.
- If moving to radically different surroundings, rural to urban or vice versa, caution your children about new situations that they will face and do your best to help prepare them for these new challenges.

Finally, even adults find that moving can sometimes cause emotional upheaval. When considering this factor, take into consideration how much greater the upheaval may be for children who are less equipped with emotional maturity, independence and the understandings of an adult to face the challenges of a move. When you move, you will move many valuable possessions, but none so precious as your children and their future well being. Give them the attention that they deserve and need and handle them with care. When you do, they should ultimately survive the transition unscathed.