How to Make it Easier For Them

by Katharine Canfield - http://www.usps.com/moversnet/kids2.html

Moving can be as challenging as it is exciting, sometimes more so. Moving is as hard for kids as it is for adults. They, too, are leaving behind familiar places and important friends. They, too, are starting over: seeking new friends and adjusting to a new home, neighborhood, and school. But because they're still learning how to socialize and how to effectively get their needs met, children need caring adults to listen and help them adjust to their new home, now more than ever.

If you're a parent contemplating a move, this article's for you. By considering a move in three stages - before, during, and after - and thinking about your children's needs during each stage, you can make a big difference in how your kids feel about the move and how they adjust afterwards.

BEFORE THE MOVE:
Preparing

- Tell your children about the move as soon as you can. The more time they have to think about and prepare for the move, the easier it will be for them.
- Give your children a chance to express their feelings, and try to be honest about your own feelings. Most children will feel some anger, sadness, or worry about the move. These responses are natural, and kids who have a chance to express them will work through their doubts more easily. Gently tell your children about any sadness you may feel about leaving or uncertainty about a new home, job, or city. This will reassure them that they aren't alone in having worries or concerns.
- Help older children prepare a list of phone numbers and addresses of close friends, relatives, and other important people in their lives. Knowing they can stay in touch with these people is an important part of a successful move.
- If your kids are old enough, let them participate in decision making. Have the kids keep a notebook of potential new homes with the positives and the negatives listed.
- If you are able to, before you move take your children to your new home and explore the new neighborhood and town or city together. If this isn't possible, take pictures of your new home, the schools your kids will attend, a nearby park, and anything else that would be interesting to them.
- Make a scrapbook containing pictures of your pre-move home, friends, and other mementos of your life together.
- Call the principal of your children's schools, and try to set up a meeting with their teachers or, if they're in junior high or high school, guidance counselor. The new school may even be able to give you names of students in your child's class who live near your new home. If so, you may want to drop by to meet them and their families before you move in.
- Try to line up some activities in which your child can participate after the move: a sports team, music lessons, art classes, a scouting troop. Not only will activities like these keep your children involved; they'll also help them to feel like part of a group - an important aspect of settling in. Try to sign up for more than one activity in case one falls through or doesn't go well.
- If you can, try to meet families in your new neighborhood before you move. Being familiar with people when you move in will help your children feel more at home.

DURING THE MOVE:
Remembering What's Important

- Throughout the move, stay as upbeat and calm as you can; a good plan makes this possible. Your own mood will impact other family members, especially babies, who are particularly sensitive to their mother's feelings. With older children, it's important to be honest about some of the

uncertainties you have, but also to be generally optimistic about the move and the positive ways it will affect the family.

- Involve your kids in the packing. Older kids can put their own belongings in boxes, and kids of all ages will enjoy decorating the boxes containing their things. Doing so will also make finding your children's things easier once you're at the new house!
- Try to stick to your routines. Have meals at the same times as always. If your kids nap, encourage them to lie down at the usual time. Keep to the normal bedtimes.
- Don't pack things that your children treasure. Take special blankets, beloved stuffed animals, favorite books, and other prized items in a separate bag or box that you can bring with you in the car or on the plane when you go to your new home.
- Help your children say good bye to the important people in their lives. For their friends, a pizza or make-your-own sundae party is a fun way to celebrate the friendship. An album or poster with photos of good times together will add to the celebration. If your children are comfortable, encourage hugs at the end of the party. With neighbors or other special adults, you may want to set up a time to stop by and say good bye as a family.
- Expect the unexpected: few moves go smoothly, anticipate trouble (predict it!) and have a positive, "can do" attitude.

AFTER THE MOVE:
Getting Settled

- Don't spend too much time unpacking - at least not right away! Sure, the essentials are important to unload and you want the house to feel settled. But wait on the less important stuff. In the first few days, take time to enjoy your new home with your family. Take walks. Check out local restaurants and take-out spots. Introduce yourselves to your new neighbors. Spend time at the park.
- Be on the look-out for neighborhood kids, and help introduce your children to them. If it's comfortable for you and your children, invite some of the neighborhood kids over for pizza or a video.
- Let your children have some input in planning on the new house, especially in choosing things to buy for their rooms. Even if you don't follow through on their ideas, it's important to listen to what they think. Be tactful if you choose another option, and let some decisions be entirely up to them - for example, the placement of their bed or the color of the rug or paint in their bedroom.
- Get involved: church groups, synagogues, YMCA and activity clubs, etc. enable socializing. If a couple of months have gone by and your child seems unusually troubled, ask a doctor, guidance counselor, or principal if you need a referral. Signs that your child may need help: unusual academic difficulty; ongoing irritability; trouble with peers; changes in sleep or eating habits; a generally despondent mood. Give them time, this behavior can last for 4-5 months for teens.
- Above all, listen. Try to be there when your kids get home after the first day at their new schools, even if it means having to leave work early that day. Regularly ask how things are going, and take time to listen. Sometimes kids have a hard time opening up; spending relaxed time together may help them to bring up whatever is on their minds.
- For children and adults, it takes time to feel at home. With your understanding and patience, your children will be reassured that, after a while, things will get easier; everything won't feel so new; and that home is, after all, wherever the family is.

For more information on moving with children and moving in general, see the book **Smart Moves: Your Guide through the Emotional Maze of Relocation** by Nadia Jensen, Audrey McCollum, and Stuart Copans. Smith & Krauss. To order a copy for $16.95, call 1-800-895-4331. The ISBN is 1575250861.