

MOVING HOUSE WITH KIDS... MAKE IT FUN!



Although moving has become a common event for Australian families, it is a ‘moving’ experience in more ways than one. No matter how often families change residence, moving brings with it a variety of emotions and situations. One out of six Australian families moves each year. Moving can be an exciting adventure for families as they look forward to new places, friends and neighbours. Many families even find that the experience of moving often brings them closer.

Moving to a new home can be a stressful time for everyone, but especially for children. It is natural, therefore, for parents to be concerned about the effect of the move. Parents often wish to help ease the transition for their children and make moving a positive experience. The good news is, it is achievable and can even be fun. Younger kids often become confused when their daily routine is disrupted, while older children and particularly teenagers, fear the loss of friends and dread the prospect of having to make new ones in a strange school or neighbourhood. But relax, there are steps you can take to help alleviate their fears and involve them in the move, it just takes a little thought and planning.

Communicate

First, it's important for parents to demystify the moving process by providing their children with as much information about the pending move as possible. Also allowing them to participate in decision-making discussions is an important part of the involvement. This will give children a sense of control and help relieve anxiety.

Talk about the positive aspects of their new home, school and neighbourhood. Take time to research the new area, facilities the children may be interested in i.e. parks, cinemas, play centres etc. Try to communicate the idea that the new home and neighbourhood, can be even better than the old one. Encourage questions and invite children to talk about their worries and concerns. It is often the simple things in life that are the children's greatest concern.

Often, preschoolers will express a great deal of excitement over a move, but may not really understand everything that is going on. The details of moving inevitably frustrate parents, and preschoolers tend to think that the chaos and frustration may somehow be their fault.

Preschoolers also find it hard to understand what will go with them and what will stay behind. They may not realise that you are taking furniture and toys with you, and may be anxious about their personal belongings and toys. Also, they may not realise that close friends and neighbours will not make the move and this takes time to sink in. But don't worry, these little people are the most resilient in the moving process, they soon see the fun side and look to you for encouragement.

Professional Assistance

If you are engaging the services of a professional removalist or relocation company, consider one who is professional, experienced and accredited. Company's such as *Wridgways The Removalists* provide a VIP door-to-door service, which means you can spend less time worrying about the packing, moving, housecleaning, car & pet transport and unpacking and spend valuable time with the children. They even provide free colouring books to involve the kids, free checklists, moving advice and free on-line quotations - www.wridgways.com.au.

Rehearse

For younger children, the move should be made into an exciting adventure because after-all, it is.

Encourage your child to pack his or her own things, writing their name and contents of their precious cartons as they go. But be sure to leave favourite toys and belongings out until the very last minute, pack them onto the moving vehicle last and bring them out first. Rehearse the moving day well ahead of time. A conversation could go something like this: "On Tuesday when you wake, there will be a big moving truck in the driveway. We will have breakfast, then go into your room and show the removalists which things to put on the truck, etc" If your children are under 10 years old, consider hiring a baby-sitter or asking for help from relatives or neighbours, while you pack and on moving and delivery days. This also assists the moving team quickly move through the home, without fear of tripping or hurting a young child. If your child is over 10 years old, perhaps resist the temptation to send him/her away during the move as participating will help them understand what's happening and adjust more easily. But no matter how much effort you put into involving and explaining to your child or children, don't be dismayed if your child exhibits unusual or regressive behaviour such as bed-wetting, anger, thumb sucking etc as this is quite normal at a time of significant change. They will soon adjust in their new environment when they see you are happy and provide the reassurance they need.

Child psychologist Dr Emma Spelling suggests that it can be helpful to engage in play-acting with your younger child using dolls, boxes and a toy truck to help them get a feel for moving before the event, and what to expect.

Ideas for a smooth transition

Human beings fear the unknown and children are no different. If possible, take children with you to look at new neighbourhood, home/apartment, and school. Even better, if you are prepared to invest a little more time and money, a relocation company is just the answer to the perfect transition. Their job is to assist you and your family settle into your new life. They appreciate that moving to a new suburb or state can be as disruptive to children and teenagers, as moving across the world. But the stress can be minimised with a little help from the experts. Move Solutions is a relocation company that specialises in all aspects of relocation including home searches, school searches, spouse counselling, furniture rental, travel arrangements and much more. Visit their website at www.movesolutions.com.au for further details.

If you cannot afford the expense of using a relocation company, there are lots you can do to involve the children.

- Take a camera or video recorder with you when you visit the new home and neighbourhood. Take footage or pictures of the new home, the child's room, the school, parks nearby, whatever you feel will be of interest to your child. Your children will appreciate the photos and/or video that you bring back, and it will help them begin the transition.
- You can also use a map to help them understand the new area and the route you will take to get there. Show them the route they will take to their new school, kinder etc. make it interesting and fun.

Make it fun

For older children, a move that involves leaving friends, sports teams and favourite hangouts behind can be extremely difficult. Help them say good-bye to friends by hosting a good-bye party if you can. Emphasize how easy it is to keep in touch through e-mail, telephone and letters; you could even give each of your children his or her own address book and make the party an opportunity for friends to write in their personal contact information. It is important they know they can easily keep in touch and know you support this.

Other ways to involve the older children is to buy them a disposable camera or let them use the family camera to take photographs on moving day. They will love being the reporter, snapping all the 'action'. Once you complete the move and are settled in, aim to make time together to create 'a moving story' in their scrap book, journal or the family photo album. Perhaps have your kids draw a picture of how they want their new room to look or a picture of them standing outside their new home with a big, happy smile.

Needless to say, children often settle in a little easier if the move coincides with the start of a new school/kinder year or term. Often new friendships commence as the new year does too, so this is often an easier transition to any new environment be it school, kinder or University. If you cannot move at a time that adheres to the term or year, contact the school and ask they assist in the child's transition, they are always keen to assist.

Getting back into the 'normal routine'

When you are settled in your new home, resume familiar routines as soon as possible. If the child usually attends swimming lessons on a Saturday morning, or enjoys watching a favourite TV program on a certain day, then aim to continue the routine as soon as possible in your new home.

Don't worry if they blame you

Finally, don't take it personally if your children blame you for taking them away from their old home and friends, it is to be expected. No matter how well you've prepared them, expect them to be a little upset and allow them some time to grieve for the life and friends they have left behind. They will almost certainly grow to love their new home just as much as the old one, they are resilient and make friends far easier than us adults. Also, remember to enjoy the experience yourself and try to remain positive for you and your children. Happy moving!

Strategies to help children adjust to the move:

- **Be understanding.** Acknowledge both positive and negative feelings from your children. Let children know that it's OK and normal to feel anxious in relation to the move.
- **Provide continuity.** Much of the stress associated with moving comes from the "newness" and "difference" of things. Try to keep routines and other daily living habits as normal as possible. This is not the time to make a lot of major changes in your family life.
- **Be patient.** New adjustments take time. Some children will ease slowly into a new situation, some will dive in head first. Allow for differences in personalities and responses at this time.
- **Be a positive role model.** Children need to see and hear their parents express their feelings and work through problems. A parent that feels comfortable with saying "Sometimes I feel scared too" or "I'm not sure where the nearest butcher is, let's go and find the shops", can provide a lot of support for children.
- **Promote peer interaction.** Try to connect to your new community as quickly as possible. Ask a neighbour if he/she will introduce your child to other neighbourhood children. Link up with familiar organisations such as sporting groups, cubs/scouts, church youth groups etc. It will all make a difference to your child.

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