

Make Moving An Adventure For Kids

To anyone who has been through the experience of moving a family, it will come as no surprise that a move ranks high on any list of stressful events. It can also be an especially anxious time for kids, whose lives are disrupted, and who are – at best – junior participants in the decision to move.

But parents can help make moving an adventure for kids – by taking the time to “think like a kid”, by involving kids in the activities and decisions, and by modeling a positive attitude.

Get off to a good start with your kids. Talk about the reasons why you’re moving and what they can expect. Be sure to include the “good stuff” – maybe the kids can finally get a dog... or a room of their own. Take them with you to look at the new house, if possible, or get some pictures so they can get excited about their new home and neighbourhood. Try to imagine what will interest each child – a hockey rink, a favourite restaurant, a special room – and have some one-on-one chats.

A move is a big event in the life of a child. Let your kids be the ones to spread the news to family, neighbours and friends; it will make them feel important and more in control of the situation.

For school-age children, two good events to focus on are 1) a garage sale of unwanted items, and 2) a going away party with friends.

There is no “best time” to move. Be prepared that your child may protest both the move and the timing of it. It may help to know that there is no best time to move. Many families choose a summer move so the kids can complete their school year, then acclimatize to their new surroundings at home before adjusting to a new school. But other families find that children – especially younger children – benefit from a move during the school year, when kids have an instant social setting (even receiving some extra attention as the “new kid”), and have a chance to make a few friends before summer.

Senior high school students have the most difficulty moving during the school year. Socially, it can be harder to “break in”, and the academic disruptions are also more serious. Students in grade 8 or their final year of high school will miss the chance to graduate with their classmates – a serious disappointment to most teens.

Let the kids help pack their belongings. Most school-age kids can get involved in packing – and deciding what items they no longer want or need. They may have fun organizing a yard sale, or they can begin to plan their new rooms. Yard sale proceeds can go towards some new game or other special purchase for the new house. Kids of all ages can also have some fun designing special stickers for their boxes, so they can identify their own belongings quickly. (Skull and crossbones... or fairy princess?)

Toddlers have simple needs. They won't worry about a new home or community, but they want to know their parents are close, and they'll want the comfort of some familiar toys and surroundings. Their tiny worlds can seem threatened, when they see the progressive disarray of pre-move activities.

Very young children can't process these changes, and may worry about being left behind. Whatever the condition of the rest of the house, try to keep a little "nest" of favourite toys, and give your toddler some special attention.

While older family members may welcome the chance to sell or donate unused belongings, this is not the time to discard any of your toddler's possessions. Also, try to set up your toddler's new room similar to the old one.

Whatever their age, your children will take their cues from you. If you're upbeat and positive about the move, they'll feel less threatened by the change. As a parent, you have a great opportunity to teach your kids how to manage their feelings, and how to handle change in a healthy way.

Take some time together to explore your new community, volunteer at their new school, get involved in the community, and make some new friends.