



Moving With Kids

Packing up and hauling a houseful of furniture to another city or state is a tough job, but it's nothing compared to moving kids who don't want to leave their home.

Even adults have emotional pangs when it's time to leave a house, friends and community ties -- but adults are the ones making the decision to leave. Children are virtually powerless in these situations, say experts. And, too often, parents underestimate their feelings.

"Most parents are pretty insensitive," says Leonard Jason, a psychology professor at DePaul University in Chicago. "They don't understand the child's point of view. They're so involved in the economics of the move -- getting the job, the house. It's hard for them to think of the child's needs."

Don't "spring" it on them

Some parents do a good job of preparing children for relocation, but others just spring it on them -- "We're moving!"

"Younger children will go into the transition more easily, they're more connected to the family," according to Jason. "Older children, in junior and senior high school, will be more upset, more vocal. They'll fight with their parents, they'll say it isn't fair."

How can parents reduce the friction? Author [Beverly Roman](#) has written several books aimed at making the moving process easier on kids. She says even children in day care can feel the disruption caused by a move.

"They may wake up in the middle of the night, their eating habits may be off. With that age group, try to keep things as much the same as possible -- mealtime, bedtime, set up their bedroom the same as before," says Roman. "Talk to them in advance. Even at age 3, they may not get the whole concept, but explain how you're moving to a new city and they'll be making new friends."

Stick to familiar routines

Roman says the same rules hold for older children. Keep as many things constant as possible -- and don't forgo discipline. Discipline should be another constant -- parents shouldn't bend rules just because they're feeling guilty about causing havoc in the child's life.

The older the child, the tougher it is to move.



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"For teens, friends and activities are their whole lives," says Roman. "When they move they give up these components and they're very worried about being accepted. It's important for children of any age to understand why they're moving, why it's a good choice for the family and why the family feels it's important. They should understand that the family will strive to pull together and make the best of the circumstances."

Seek help from the new school

Jason says that schools need to do a better job of helping young children adjust to a new school. He suggests they take a cue from hospitals, which have developed programs aimed at reducing stress in young patients. Jason recommends schools develop a buddy system.

"All schools should, at a minimum, have opportunities for the child to talk about their feelings," he says. "They should be able to talk to children who have made a successful transfer. They should have a buddy to guide them through the school for the first few weeks, introduce them to other students and accompany them to activities."

In addition, Jason says it's critically important for schools to do a careful assessment to make sure the transferring child is prepared academically for the new school. "If they come from one school system with certain standards, then go to another with higher standards, it can start a long cycle of frustration and failure. If the child isn't ready, the school needs to provide extra resources such as tutoring."

Monitor behavior closely

Parents need to be alert to changes in their child's behavior before and after the move. Some changes will be obvious -- crying, depression, aggressiveness. Others, according to Jason, will be more subtle -- feeling neglected or rejected. Sometimes children may be so frightened by a move that they clam up and don't talk about their feelings.

The good thing to remember about this is that most kids are pretty resilient and adapt well to a move within two or three months. Here are some tips from Beverly Roman for making the transition as smooth as possible -- for more ideas, visit her Web site at the above link.

- Talk to your children and keep them in the loop about your plans to move.
- Hold family meetings so children can air their feelings or concerns about the move.
- Share the packets of information you have about the area.



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- Take the older kids on house-hunting trips. If your company won't pay for that, paying for them yourself may be worth the added expense.
- If you can't take the kids on a house-hunting trip, take a camera and take pictures of the house, school -- anything that may be of interest to the children.
- Encourage children to keep in touch with their old friends through e-mail or phone.
- Give the child a trip back to the old hometown to visit friends.

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