

## Moving To A New Home

One of five American families moves each year. Most moves are within the same community or to a neighboring state.

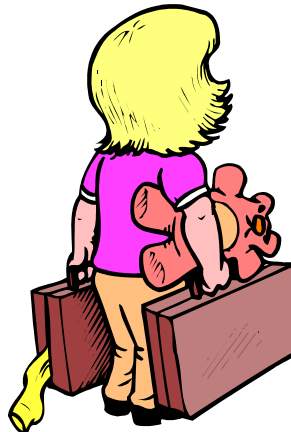
Moving can be an exciting adventure as you look forward to new places, friends, and neighbors. Many families find that the experience of moving brings them closer.

Yet, there is also an element of grief. No matter how eager you are to move there are places, things, and people you will miss. When moving is brought about by a death, divorce, or job loss, the sense of loss and sadness is more acute.

Moving is a challenging and difficult experience for a family, especially children. Preschoolers may express a great deal of excitement over a move, but may not really understand everything that is going on. Preschoolers find it hard to understand what will go with them and what will stay behind. They may not realize that you are taking furniture and toys with you and often develop great fears for their personal belongings and toys. Also, they may not realize that close friends and neighbors will not make the move.

### Strategies to Help Children Adjust to Moving

- When you pack your child's toys in boxes, make sure to explain that you aren't throwing or giving them away.
- Involve your child in some of the tasks of the moving by having your child pack things into a box. Though it takes a bit more effort, your child will learn from the experience and will also feel in control of the experience of moving.



- Show your child pictures of the new house, room (if possible), the new community so these things will seem more familiar when you arrive at your new home. If your new home is nearby and vacant, take your child to visit before the move.
- Try to make the change as concrete and tangible as possible. Buy a new doll house, set it up in another part of the house. Pack up the family and their furniture in a toy truck and play out the moving activities.
- Create a book about moving, with drawings and photographs of the old house and new house.
- Read children's books about moving. Children's literature can help a child prepare for and understand difficult situations. Story characters model successful coping strategies.
- Even though it makes moving day more hectic, have the children around during some of the time as the movers load the truck. If children do not see the moving process, they will rely on their imaginations. Real experiences help guide them through the process - even if seeing their belongings carried out of the house is initially distressing.
- Hold off on getting rid of your child's old bedroom furniture, which may provide a sense of comfort to your child in the new house.
- Details of moving inevitably frustrate parents, and preschoolers tend to think that the chaos and frustration may somehow be their fault. Say, "I have many jobs to do for our moving. Sometimes I get overwhelmed by all the tasks to complete. I want you to know that I am not upset with you. It's all the packing and sorting that stresses me."
- Keep your routine as normal and predictable as possible. Regular eating and nap times are important. This is not

the time to make major changes in your family life.

- Encourage your preschooler to talk about the move. Acknowledge both positive and negative feelings. Let children know that it's OK and normal to feel anxiety. Watch for verbal and nonverbal communication.
- Hook into the community quickly. Link up with preschool play groups, storybook hours, or religious activities.
- Young children often wonder what items will go with them and what will stay behind. Let them know you might sell or give away things that the new home already has or that you just don't need anymore. Remind them that bathtubs, sinks, and toilets cannot be moved. Also, sometimes swing sets and sand boxes must stay behind, but new ones can be built at the new home.

### Take into Account Your Child's Temperament

How easily your child adjusts to a move depends to a large extent on his temperament. You probably know whether changes and transitions are easy or difficult for your child. Some children are naturally outgoing and will be able to make friends immediately while some other children may take months.

Some aspects of your child's personality may tend to get more pronounced. For instance, if your child tends to worry and get nervous, you are likely to see more of this behavior until the child feels comfortable in the new surroundings. Roller coaster emotions are not uncommon. One day your child may be thrilled and excited, then blue and depressed the next.

During this time of change expect your preschooler to be more clingy than usual. If your child is intense you may see more loud protests for a while. These should lessen once life settles back down.

### How Long Will Your Child Take to Adjust to the Move?

Everyone—adults and children—need time to adjust, often as long as 16 months. For some

families, the most stressful time is two weeks before and two weeks after the move. For many families, however, the time of the move is one when everyone pitches in and works together as a team. It is only a month or so after the move that the reality of friends and places left behind begins to sink in. Frustration, anger, and confusion are common emotions at this time. Moving is stressful for adults and is particularly stressful for children as they have limited coping skills.

The more things your child can keep that are familiar (bedding, a special toy, a special blanket, favorite books, etc.), the better. Try to keep routines (naptime, bedtime, mealtime, etc.) the same, as much as possible. Give your child familiar, favorite foods for meals.

If your child regresses to babytalk or loss of toilet training, remember that regression is a normal response to stress, partly a wish to return to the past. Affirm your child's feelings of sadness, anger, or fear by letting your preschooler know that these feelings are normal. To deal with the distress of moving, you need to reaffirm your child's attachment to you, for that bond is the essence of a child's sense of security. Show you care for your child with actions and words, "I love you. I will be here to take care of you and keep you safe in our new home."



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