

Before, During and After Moving to a New Home

Whether it's across town or across the country, moving is a big adjustment for children (okay, for us grown-ups, too). Before, during, and after a household move, parents can help ease the transition and make it a positive experience for the whole family. Here are some suggestions:

When the decision is made

- Tell your children about an upcoming move soon, before they hear the news from friends or relatives. Explain why it's happening. Talk about differences they can expect, emphasizing opportunities without painting too rosy a picture.
 - Children will react with anything from excitement to shock and grief. Listen compassionately. Assure them that it's normal to be happy, sad, nervous, and even angry all at the same time.
 - They'll track your emotions with uncanny radar. Stay on an even course by getting plenty of healthful food, sleep, and exercise and by dealing with your own move-related anxieties.
 - Show your kids pictures of your new home or, if possible, take them to see it. Draw a simple map of the new neighborhood highlighting your home, the school, places to play, etc.
 - Young folks enjoy being part of the planning. Together, make a to-do list that includes projects for everyone in the family. Hang a large calendar where children can help mark off the days to "Moving Day."
 - Your kids will take ownership of the move if they pack their own belongings. Youngsters can color and decorate their own packing boxes for quick and fun identification at the new home.
- "Travel kits" with toys, games, and snacks are indispensable for the move, and putting them together will occupy your kids for hours. You might give them a diary to include or restaurant coupons for stops en route to the new home.
 - Children agonize over saying goodbye to friends. Some simple rituals will ease their leave-taking. Encourage them to start a scrapbook in which buddies can write addresses, phone numbers, e-mail, and personal messages. With inexpensive, disposable cameras, your children can capture faces of classmates, teachers, and friends. They can also address and stamp envelopes or postcards to your new home and give them to friends.
 - Teenagers may be saying goodbye to friends they've known all their lives, or may be leaving a girlfriend or boyfriend. They face the trauma of being the new kid in school at an age when they have little self-confidence. Do what you can to accommodate them. Be patient.

The big day

Take some of the heck out of hectic on moving day.

- A good night's rest will leave you fresh and calm, setting the tone for your kids.
- Regular mealtimes and other routines reduce kids' anxiety. Have a friend or favorite relative lined up to provide lunches and help with children too young to carry boxes or furniture.
- At your new address, unpack the kids' rooms first. Set up the beds and make them cozy. As they're able, your kids will enjoy arranging their own "stuff"—toys, furniture, computers, clothes, etc.

- Truck's unloaded? Essentials unpacked? Take a family break and concentrate on each other instead of the inevitable mess. Walk around the block. Go out for a quick bite. Flop in bed early.

Making a new home

- Relax, those boxes aren't going anywhere. But your kids are going into a new world and need emotional support.
- Explore the community together with specific goals in mind: getting library cards, locating schools and meeting teachers, tracking down parks, perhaps finding an appropriate faith community.
- Welcome kids' new friends to your home.
- If you're social, don't wait for neighbors to make the first move; invite them over.



The challenge of moving with children can be increased if you're divorced from their other parent. Kids will need reassurance that both of you will remain involved in their lives. Do what you can to make it happen.

Keep your ex-partner in the information loop. Well in advance of the move, make arrangements for continuing visitation and other parental rights. You may decide on fewer, longer visits or shorter visits more often. You and your ex-partner may want to arrange for cell phone service and/or e-mail service for the children.

Kid troubles? Call the Student Assistance Program and arrange to see a counselor. Contacts are confidential within legal limits and available at no cost to students and their family members. Call (515) 244-6090 or toll free (800) 327-4692. Counselors are on call 24 hours a day.