

MOVING HOUSE WITH CHILDREN

Moving house can be stressful for everyone involved, but for children the degree of stress it creates can be underestimated. For them it can mean the loss of their friends, changing schools, and leaving behind a familiar and safe environment. For children of single parents this might be even more important to bear in mind as their routine may already have changed dramatically with the loss of their family unit.

If the move is planned well then it is possible to make it much less stressful and possible, even exciting for the children involved.

The following tips aim to give you advice on how you can make the transition much smoother:-

- Talk to your children about the move and what changes it will entail. Give them as much time to get used to the idea as possible. If your children are younger, talk to them in short doses as their attention spans will be quite limited;
- Involve your children in the house hunting process - take them to look at houses with you, and if necessary, and if they are old enough to understand, explain why a particular property may not be suitable;
- Get your children involved in the move - let them make decisions on how they want to decorate or paint (check with landlord first how much redecorating you are allowed to do) their rooms. Maybe they can paint or draw some pictures which you could frame to put in their new bedroom;
- Let them help with the packing, labeling of boxes, ticking off lists;
- If you are able to, take your child(ren) with you to have a look at the new house prior to moving. Maybe take a photo of the new house and their new room so that they can spend time looking at it and deciding how they want to decorate or place their furniture;
- Depending upon the age of your child, you may want to take them physically around each room in the old house to say goodbye, or maybe dig up a plant or tree from the garden to plant in their new house as a keepsake;
- Try and make sure that the child's bedroom is the first room you unpack and make cosy after moving;
- Make sure you stick to normal eating and sleeping routines as much as possible after the move;
- It is best not to introduce too many other new experiences after the move - e.g. new sports clubs, or after school activities.

Physical and Emotional Reactions in Children

Some children may show no negative reactions at all to moving house. Others may show any or all of the follow:-

- Wetting the bed
- Refusing to eat
- Aggression
- Insomnia
- Clinging
- Thumb sucking
- Reverting to baby talk
- Become shy
- Stomach ache or headaches

- Changes to sleeping patterns

These are ways in which children, who are not always able to express their feelings verbally, may deal with the stress of change. During this time it is important that you spend quality time with your children and listen to them if they want to talk.

You will probably find that younger children (5 and under) find moving house the least difficult. You can read them stories about people moving house, and play games with their toys that relate to moving. Make sure you explain that their toys are not being taken away, but are just being put in boxes for a short while.

If your children are quite young, don't be tempted to buy new furniture for the children's rooms at this point as they will find their own things familiar.

If you have children of school age and the move involves changing schools, it will be helpful to take them for a look around before the move. Because teenagers understand things a lot more, and their friends are a very important part of their life, you may find that this is the age that suffers the most. Make sure you take time to talk to them and respect their feelings. Try and find a way for them to keep in touch with their old friends, at least until they have made new ones in their new environment, as this is something experts are now in agreement on as being important.

If you are moving during school holidays, maybe arrange for one of their old friends to come and stay for a few days. That way your child can explore the new area with someone they are familiar with.

It normally takes about 6 weeks for a child to adjust to their new school and surroundings. If after 2 or 3 months there is no improvement, consider talking to a professional.