

Supporting Children During A Move

Some families experience a stressful time two weeks before and two weeks after a move. Confusion, anger, and frustration are common emotions at this time. Some specific ways you can help your children cope with a move include:

- Being understanding of their feelings
- Keeping daily routines as normal as possible
- Being patient while they adjust
- Showing them how you cope with the adjustment
- Helping them find other children to play with
- Using books to help them understand and prepare for the move.

If the move is coupled with financial problems, a death or divorce, this can make the problem worse, stretching children's coping skills to the limit. Get support payments modified or set up before moving to a new state. Short-term counseling may help children through this challenging time.

To make the move easier on children, take these steps:

- Explain clearly to the children why the move is necessary.
- Take time to talk with each of your children separately about the move and what it means to them.
- Try to portray the move as an adventure with new and exciting experiences lying ahead.

- Familiarize the children as much as possible with the new area with maps, photographs, or a daily newspaper.
- Describe advantages of the new location that the child might appreciate such as a lake, mountain, or an amusement park.
- Get your children involved in some of the packing, in particular give them the job of packing their toys.
- Clearly explain the sequence of moving day events to your children. After the move, get involved with the children in activities of the local church or synagogue, PTA, scouts, YMCA, etc.
- Give adolescents three months' notice of an upcoming move. Adolescents appear to be affected most because of the importance of peer relationships during this time.
- If a son or daughter is a senior in high school, consider the possibility of letting him or her stay with a trusted family until the school year is over.
- Let children participate in designing or furnishing their room.
- Help children keep in touch with friends from a previous neighborhood through telephone, letters, e-mail, and personal visits.
- The most important thing for parents to do during a move is to make sure that they don't overlook a child's reactions to it. Some children will

let you know exactly how they're feeling by what they say or how they behave, while others may withdraw and not say a word. But if a child isn't asking questions or talking about the move, it may be signal that he or she is worried or anxious about it, and parents need to create opportunities to talk about the move and reassure the child.

- Significant cues to look for during a move that might indicate a child is having a difficult time are things like: sleep problems or nightmares, excessive crying, frustration, or outbursts of anger, a reluctance to leave the house or to be away from parents, unreasonable fears or a resistance toward engaging in activities with other children. These behaviors should disappear as the child becomes familiar with the new surroundings but if they persist for long periods of time, parents should seek the advice of a pediatrician or mental health professional.