

# Moving the Family

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## Tips on Moving Military Kids of All Ages

*By Hope Katz Gibbs*

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*Have you just gotten word that it's time to move your family? Again. You aren't alone, of course. But that doesn't make it any easier to break the news to your kids.*

*Here's something that might make that chat a little less dramatic.*

*According to Dr. Frederick Medway, a professor of psychology at South Carolina University, moving kids frequently does them no emotional harm. In fact, if handled well, most kids not only survive — they thrive.*

Medway based his conclusion on interviews with more than 200 children who had moved 8-12 times. Publish in 2002, the study (entitled: “Adolescents’ Mobility Histories and Present School Adjustment”) found that although moving can be challenging for families to deal with, children who are emotionally stable, and have the support of their parents, fare just fine.

“My research shows that most kids are very resilient, and if both mom and dad have a positive attitude about the move, the kids aren't going to be traumatized,” says Medway, who for the last two decades has advised military families on everything from making transitions to coping with war. “Kids can now turn on their PC and thanks to email and Instant Messaging they can talk to friends all over the country. They can send photos just snapped on a digital camera, or even talk by computer phone. Thanks to the Internet, bonds definitely don't need to be broken.”

He cautions, however, that there are two subgroups of children who sometimes have trouble making a move.

“We did find that if kids have pre-existing problem [such as a history of being withdrawn] they have a tougher time adjusting to their new home,” he says. “Also, in families where the mother is chronically depressed, or just not happy about the moving, kids in the family are likely to be despondent, too.”

The good news is that many women knew what their lives would be like when they said, “I do” to a man in the Armed Forces. As a result, Medway believes most military moms don’t tend to harbor feelings of

resentment about being uprooted.

“Also,” he explains, “military families tend to socialize with other military folks – and as a result nearly everyone they know deals with similar challenges. Feeling like you are part of a community can be a nice buffer.”

When moving frequently, though, Medway does advise

military families to consider enrolling their kids in schools

on military bases.

“Children have much less trouble getting settled into these types of schools because the curriculum tends to be standardized,” he notes. “In fact, I would like to see public schools systems across the country embrace a more standardized approach. Statistics show that 1 in 5 families moves every few years, and by having a national curriculum kids would have an easier time adapting.”

Even if your child has to adapt to a public school, Medway believes moving kids frequently has plenty of advantages.

“Military kids get to see a lot of different places and people, taste new kinds of foods, and experience a variety of cultures and religions,” he feels. “That exposure gives them a broad perspective of the world, and helps them develop emotions tools to deal with change. These tools come in very handy when they become adults, too.”

## The experience of a lifetime

Dr. Medway’s findings come as happy news to Denise Cook, a teacher and military wife who in October 2004 got word that her husband Tom, a lieutenant colonel

in the U.S. Army, had an opportunity he couldn’t refuse.

The Army wanted to pay for him to get his PhD in software engineering at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, CA starting in the fall of 2005. The only rub: The family was happily living in the suburban hamlet of Clifton, Virginia. What complicated matters was the fact that their 6-year-old son, Tommy, would have to leave his circle of friends and beloved hockey team.

“I knew moving was definitely going to pull on our heart strings,” explains Denise, who has moved nine



times in the 17 years she and Tom have been married. “But this was something Tom couldn’t pass up. And who wouldn’t want to live in Monterey?”

So, the 38-year-old mom knew there was only one thing to do: Make the move into an awesome adventure.

For months, she researched the schools, activities, doctors and neighborhoods in Monterey. She found the perfect school for Tommy - and also landed a teaching job for herself. Fortunately, she and Tom had lived in Southern California before and Denise reconnected with old friends before ever leaving Virginia.

Then, she and Tom did something they always wanted to do: They planned a cross-country summer trip to help them make the transition from east coast to west.

“We knew Tommy would love seeing all the places in the U.S. that he was learning about in school,” Denise shares. “We got him involved in picking a few of the stops along our route. Since Tom has been in the Army for years, we have friends in almost every state. So, we made plans to stay with many of them as we passed through their towns.”

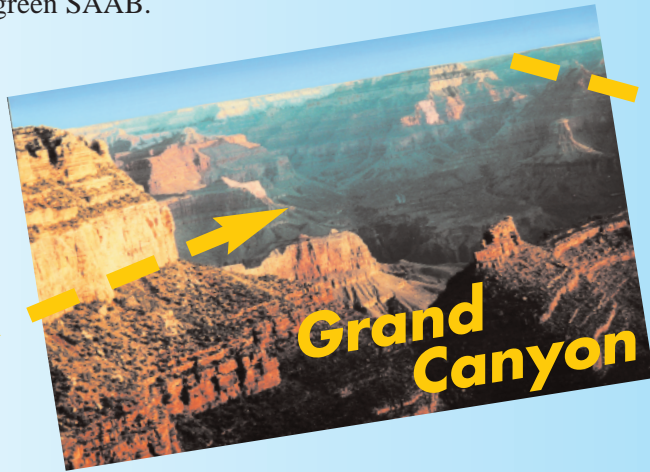
The fun started as soon as the movers picked up the last box from their newly sold house in early June.

“We had about three days between the time our stuff was hauled away and we were scheduled to leave, so we kept two mattresses and our sleeping bags with us, and we camped out in the empty house,” Denise notes.

Then, on moving day, Tom got on his motorcycle,

and Tommy and Denise trailed behind using walkie-talkies to stay in touch through the first leg of the trip: a ride to their hometown in upstate New York where they said goodbye to their families, and left the Harley behind.

Then in late June, the Cooks packed up their emerald green SAAB.



“I know from experience that you have to make the transition slowly and with joy, and the best way to do that is to bring along for the ride the things that make you feel like you are home,” Denise believes. “Tommy got to pack his favorite books and toys, and I brought

mine. It definitely wasn’t sad, because we were all so excited about the cross-country trip.”

The reality of moving, she admits, is that it is tough - but wonderful.

“I know from experience that some of our belongings will get broken on their way to California, and other things will be lost.

But I also know that once we get there, we will make new friends, have wonderful things we couldn’t predict. Although we’ll really miss our old friends and neighborhood, e-mail keeps us in touch and true friends are always your friends. I told that to Tommy, and he seems to be okay with it.”

What tricks have you used to help make the move to a new home exciting and fun for your kids? Send your tips to: [www.ameriforce.net](http://www.ameriforce.net).

