

Have Children, Must Travel...

by Tara Puckey

While your military counterpart skirts various terrain in tracked and wheeled vehicles, heavily armed and ready to complete a mission; you, too, are on a mission of your own—just a different kind.

There is no armored vehicle or body armor to shield you from the projectile vomit in the back seat that inevitably seems to happen when you are five minutes from your final destination. There is no heavy metal to drown out the screaming, fighting, and crying. But there may be some ways you can go armed to complete the mission without any disasters.

- Pack a new bag of toys, but keep them up front with you. By unveiling the new treasures slowly and keeping some in reserve, you can save something special for major meltdowns. Stay away from toys with little pieces though; you likely won't be seeing those again until they pop up in your sweeper canister.
- Take everything paper. Grab some cheap activity books, a small box of crayons, and some plain drawing paper. Bigger kids can play the license plate game while tots will have fun just drawing some of the things they pass along the way. Inexpensive clipboards can help keep everything straight and secure.
- Roll to the tunes. Unless you have satellite radio and can jam to Radio Disney, you might want to throw some fun children's music

into the CD player. Singing along as a group is a great way to smooth over fights and pass the time.

- Don't forget to tote technology. Even toddlers seem to be able to use new electronics these days. Pack some personal DVD players with their favorite movies. Make sure you bring the headphones to give yourself some much-deserved quiet.
- Medicine must go with you. Someone will get sick, scrapes will occur, and you definitely will have a headache. Elastic band-aids, children's acetaminophen and other first aid items can be kept in a plastic baggie to avoid sticky messes.
- Plan, plan, plan! Take a map and mark good places for potty breaks, a possible picnic at a nice rest area if the weather permits, and maybe a small mini-trip to a local attraction to peak the kids' interest.
- If you're happy, they're happy. Stay positive and don't get worked up. Children sense what you're feeling and often mimic it. If you get stressed about traffic in a huge city, chances are the kids will start to get restless, too.

Enjoy the scenery and the quality time with your children, but don't lose sight of your mission. The point is to arrive safely—so be careful, buckle up, and have some fun.



Photo by Jennifer Williams

Moving is a challenge at any age. But knowing what to expect and some things to do for your child's specific age group can help.

From the *It's Your Move* pamphlet, here are some tips for moving with:

Young Children

- Keep babies and little children on a schedule that approximates their usual eating, nap and bedtime schedule.
- Be sure that they get balanced meals and enough rest.
- Keep children moving. Exercise is important.
- Choose mealtime places with special accommodations for children to run and play. Try to find hotels with swimming pools and playrooms and restaurants that cater to children.

For infants

- Keep baby food and bottles in your own carry-on or handy in the car.
- You may need baby towels, an extra blanket, clothes, other food, some toys, etc.
- Be sure to take an ample supply of bottles and diapers to keep the baby comfortable.
- Make sure infant has plenty of room to sleep.
- Check infant and child seats to be sure that they are appropriate for the size of the child.

For Toddlers

- Take enough toys, books and games to keep toddlers happy and entertained.
- DVDs/CDs/tape players with "read me a book" tapes can be very helpful.
- Have healthy snacks readily available.

Elementary School

- Tell your children about the move as soon as the decision is made.
- Share your thoughts with them/answer questions honestly.
- Enlist their help and ideas.

- Give the children encouragement, recognition and approval.
- Take pictures of the new area/residence, both inside and outside, including the front door, child's room, yard or play area, and other places of particular interest in the community, such as parks and amusement areas.
- Involve the children in planning the decor of their new bedrooms or play areas.
- Take pictures or videos of friends and memorable areas you are leaving.

Teenagers

- Female teenagers are the group most affected by relocation, followed by all high school seniors.
- Teenagers are independent. We as parents tend to think that they will handle the move "like an adult", but they are still in the process of letting go.
- Teenagers are unwilling to accept our advice easily.
- We tend to back off if we encounter any resistance from our teens—don't. Stay the course.

Things you can do to help:

- Provide information.
- Make them part of the move.
- Share all feelings and emotions.
- Get them acclimated to school and community.
- Be aware of deadlines or cut-off dates for certain activities.
- Visit the school before enrolling.
- Find out about the dress code, before and after school routines, and lunch activities.
- Get a copy of school newspaper—learn about the activities and special programs.
- Hand-carry a second copy of each child's transcript, the first should have been mailed.
- Learn about credits required for graduation.
- Encourage teens to become involved in an extra curricular activity at the new school—this helps them find friends with similar interests more quickly.
- Plan ways to record some of the favorite—and not so favorite—things about the place they are leaving.
- Find out about local youth programs.

Let Your Child Help With Moving Preparations

- Check out websites for new area and schools.
- Clean out basements, garages, or yard prior to the move.
- Assist with tag sale or the charity donation of unwanted toys, clothing, and books.
- Assist in planning care of plants and pets during the move.
- Be sure to let them pick out a few favorite items to carry with you during the move.

- Organize their belongings for the movers to pack.
- Collect addresses of their friends and neighbors.
- Help plan a "Goodbye, Friends" party.
- Check out what kind of youth sponsorship programs are available in your new location.

Moving Day Suggestions

- Let them pack their own bags of items important to them.

- Be sure favorite toys, dolls, etc. are taken in the car or put into a "first to unpack" box.
- Make certain that enough fun games, books, songs, and/or tapes are taken for the trip to the new location.
- You can invent a guessing game about the new location for the family to play in the car.

Visit www.defenselink.mil/mtom and www.militarystudent.org for more information on helping children at any age during a move.

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