

Easing the Move for Children

By Bennett Leigh

One of the hardest parts of moving is preparing your children for the big change. No matter if you are moving across town or across the country, no matter if it's your first move or your 15th, moving to a new place is one of the most stressful events in a child's or teenager's life. But there are some ways you can help ease the transition to a new place and make the whole process a little less scary.

When you find out about an upcoming move, tell your children about it. Let them ask questions about their new home, community and school. Use the Internet — look up houses, schools and things to do in your new community. This can help your child get excited about the move. This is an especially good way to prepare your teen — they can see their new school and the activities it offers. If your child is an avid soccer player or gymnast, find some community leagues, gyms or school teams they can join.

Whether your child is four or 14, saying goodbye to friends is never easy. Make or buy your child an address book to record all their friend's contact information — including e-mail. Help them take pictures of their friends for a scrapbook you can help them make once things settle down again. Ask your children to make a list of things they'd like to do or see before you leave. Then, try to do as many of the things as are feasible. Also have them make a list of some things they'd like to do once you arrive at your new home — there

may be a zoo or an amusement park nearby. Plan to take a break from unpacking your 742 boxes to do one or two of those things — you could all probably use the break by then!

Help children and teens go through their stuff before the packers get there. Put the toys they no longer play with and the clothes they've outgrown into a big box to give to friends with younger children or donate them to a charity.



Children want to be involved, but don't always know what they can do to help. So much of moving is "grown-up stuff," but there are many things you can let your child do that will be helpful to you, as well as helping them to feel they are a part of the move. Maybe your older children could watch your younger ones while the packers are there, or maybe they could run to the store or get lunch for everyone on those days you have to be at home (like when the packers or

movers are there). Even younger children can get into the action by picking out which movies and books to take on the trip.

Many young children worry that they will be leaving all their "stuff" behind in a move — reassure them that all the important things will be going with you, and will just be in a different house. And make sure to keep any special toys or comfort objects in a separate closet or room the packers and movers are instructed not to touch — finding out that your daughter's blanket she has to have to go to sleep is now packed away in one box in a sea of many would not be good.

On the day you leave, be prepared for your child to be emotional (you probably will be, too), so pack a little extra patience all around. Stock up on their favorite snacks and movies (this is when a portable DVD player or game system would be ideal — maybe save a few new releases to unveil on the road, when the inevitable boredom sets in), and say goodbye to your old home. If you are driving, have your children follow your progress on a map. Do take the time, if you can, to stop and see some silly or interesting things along the way — a bison ranch overlook off I-70 in Colorado or the giant, painted Razorback on a hillside off I-40 in Arkansas — if your children are so inclined.

And finally, talk about the things you'd like to do in your new community and everything that will be available for your child to do there. Create some excitement about your arrival, and the trip will be more fun than work (well, at least where your children are concerned). ●