

Ten ways to help your family prepare for a move

By Erin K. Witt

Moving can be a difficult and stressful time for the entire family, but especially children. Don't minimize their fears, but offer reassurance that, while their neighborhood and house have changed, the love and support of their family won't change. Here are some tips to help your children, and your family as a whole, prepare for a move.

Tip #1: Read all about it. Go to the library and check out a few children's books on moving, going to a new school and making friends. Read them often, especially as you get closer to the move. Seeing other children in similar circumstances and seeing that things worked out fine will reassure your child on some of the issues he is most worried about. Ask your librarian for suggestions.

Tip #2: Map it out. Maps can help make an unknown place seem more real—and less mysterious—to kids. Once you know where you're going to be moving, hang a map of your new town on the wall and highlight key places, like your street, the school and the library. A floor plan of your new house is another good idea. Together, you and your child can study it and talk about what will go where, focusing especially on his room. You might even enlarge that floor plan on a copier and let your child draw in furniture.

Tip #3: Decorate boxes. Demystify what will happen to your child's belongings by letting him pack up and label a few boxes with his name. Even toddlers can decorate already-packed boxes of their belongings with stickers or drawings—a simple way to reassure them that their prized possessions will not be forgotten.

Tip #4: Say farewells. Make your list of important friends, babysitters, teachers and family members with your child. Some people you can call or e-mail, while others can get an in-person farewell. Also, think of your favorite places—like the park and the ice cream store—and schedule time for some goodbye visits before the move. If it's a long list, work with your child to pick the top three.

Tip #5: Make it fun. Rather than a sad farewell as the family belongings are packed into a truck, make moving a fun event. Order pizza and let your children invite a few friends over to watch. A picnic on the front lawn or porch will keep them out of the way of the movers, but still give them a great view of the action, and room to run around and play. If you expect this to be a very busy day for you, hire their favorite babysitter to keep an eye on the children, and arm her with a camera too.

Tip #6: Assign special jobs. For very young kids, the best place on moving day is away from the chaos with a sitter. But for older kids, having a special job—like helping haul boxes to the truck—can provide a sense of control over the move. Other ways your child can help include sweeping empty rooms, entertaining younger siblings, walking the dog or making signs for the new home (i.e. playroom, dining room) so the movers know which boxes go where.

Tip #7: Make your child the photographer. On the big day, give your child a single-use camera and let him record what's going on around him. This allows him to be in control and focus on what's important to him. When you get to your new house, he can do the same, photographing his new room, the backyard swing or whatever catches his eye. Later, he can put all the photos, with captions, in a Moving Day scrapbook.

Tip #8: Celebrate your arrival. As soon as you step over the threshold of your new home, do something to mark this momentous occasion. Make a toast with sparkling cider or put on some music and dance around. In other words, help your kids see this as the beginning of a great adventure

Tip #9: Settle in quickly. Be sure that the children's rooms are the first to be made ready in the new house. In the chaos of a new move, it will be comforting for them to have the security of their own beds, made with familiar linens and ready for sleeping. If possible, bring their linens with you in the car, or pack them separately and clearly mark the box so you can take care of this step with ease.

Tip #10: Explore the neighborhood. After your first night in the house, take some time away from the unpacking to walk your children around the neighborhood to meet the other kids. Even outgoing children may turn shy in a new neighborhood. Help them get acquainted. Go on family walks in the late afternoon or early evening for a few days. Other adults are likely to be home, and you can meet some of your neighbors this way.