

Moving Madness

11 ways to minimize the mayhem for the kids.

by Heidi Smith Luedtke

Moving is both exciting and scary because kids don't know what to expect.

Helping kids cope with a military move takes compassion, planning and patience. Here are some ways to make your kids' next move better.

1. Listen to kids' concerns.

Talk with kids about what the move means to them. Ask good questions. "What do you think we should do about...?" or "If you could change one thing...?" are helpful conversation starters. Then, listen without interrupting. Show kids you value their perspective.

2. Take a virtual tour.

Gather the kids around the computer and research your new hometown on the Internet. Find kid-friendly fun they can look forward to. Getting the lay of the land makes new places easier to imagine and more fun to anticipate.

3. Enlist their help.

Give kids a role in planning for relocation needs. Ask them to collect and pack a small box of essentials. And, ask older kids to help younger ones prepare for moving day.

4. Honor their treasures.

Create a keepsake box for each child and let him or her decorate and label it. Keep it small so you can bring it along in the car or on the plane. Allow kids to fill the box with loved items before the packing pandemonium ensues. This ensures items of value arrive safely at your new home and you can find them.

5. Facilitate kid connections.

To prepare kids for upcoming interactions, identify conversation-starting questions they can use. "Where did you go for vacation?" or "What is your favorite movie?" are good options. Your child should be ready to share their vacation destination and favorite film, too.

6. Role-play scary situations.

Acting out feared encounters can reduce anxious feelings. Rehearse scenarios like meeting a new friend or introducing yourself to the class. Let stuffed animals serve as audience members and practice until kids feel comfortable. Take role play seriously, but make it fun too.

7. Enjoy routines and rituals.

Stability is soothing, so stick to your usual eating and sleeping routines as much as possible. Cook favorite foods, read well-loved bedtime stories, and don't skip bath time. Daily rituals help kids feel grounded. Create memorable moving rituals, too.

8. Get out and involved fast.

The unpacking can wait. Get out of the house and into the community right away. Find the recreation center, go to library story time or attend church. Make it a priority to do at least one activity per day out of the house, even if you still can't find the toaster.

9. Share new adventures with old friends.

There's no reason kids can't stay connected to old pals during and after the move. Make a list of friends' postal and e-mail addresses and send postcards from the road. Encourage kids to write letters describing their new house and activities. Writing allows kids to reflect on their feelings and keeps special friends close. It can't hurt academically, either.

10. Personalize new surroundings.

Emphasize ownership by allowing kids to help organize and decorate their own rooms. Put your child's name on the door or hang a special picture over her bed to signify this is her home turf. Display loved objects on a shelf or bookcase. When the room's ready, give your child responsibility for keeping it tidy.

11. Show kids love and affection.

More than anything else, kids want to feel loved. They thrive on parents' undivided attention, which is hard to come by at moving time. Hugs and kisses, tickles and touses and pats on the back are especially valued. Don't get so busy you forget to show kids you love them every day. Parents' love is constant, even if everything else changes. **MSM**