

MOVING AND CHILDREN.

Moving has become a common feature of the Australian way of life. Statistics indicate that one out of four families moves every year. Many of these families are “old hands” at relocating; others will be moving this year for the first and perhaps only time.

Whether a family are veterans or rookies in the moving process, one aspect of moving that is frequently overlooked, or left to chance, is the effect that relocation will have on children.

Many factors contribute to how a child reacts to a move. Here is a brief look into some of them.

How do you feel about the move?

If you, as parents, view the change as the fulfilment of some hope or ambition, the feeling you will transmit to those around you will be a happy one. You will meet the inconvenience of relocating

with an optimistic outlook. On the other hand, if the move is associated with disappointment or grief you and your children will be troubled, and the children may be unintentionally left to fend for themselves in a situation they probably don't understand.

Regardless of the motivation for your move, attention to children's feelings is very important - which leads to the second factor.

Discuss the move with your kids.

Talking about the move with your children is a matter of top priority. Explain to them, at their own level of understanding, exactly why you are moving, what the new home will be like, and how they can contribute to the success of the family's relocation.

Encourage them to express whatever feelings they have on the subject. Accept their

attitudes, even if they are negative, and discuss with them your own feelings.

Remember that you probably have some misgivings about leaving too, no matter how nice your new situation promises to be.

Above all, be honest. Truth will go a lot further than pretence or made-up stories in preparing children for the move. Remember that the strength of the family as a unit will contribute immeasurably to the readiness and confidence with which the children adapt to their new surroundings.

Your last move.

If children have moved before, the current move will probably recall memories of feelings they experienced during previous moves. If the feelings weren't pleasant, they may exhibit signs of depression, withdrawn behaviour, or tantrums as the pending

moving day nears. Watch for the signs, and when dealing with them remember that your children may not fully understand the reasons for their behaviour.

For children who have not moved before, this experience may be their first with giving up the known for the unknown. While they may seem to accept the move well, understand that their need for reassurance and security is high.

Kids of different ages need a different kind of moving day.

Each child, because of differences in age and life-experience, will view the move differently. Infants, of course, will be least affected. As long as they are comfortable and their normal routine isn't disrupted too much, they won't be concerned.

Pre-school children can pose

a real problem. Their sense of identity relies on the parents, the family routine, and several objects that are special to them. When they see their favourite toys being packed and put away, their cot being dismantled, and their mother rushing about with apparently little time to spend with them, they begin to worry. One of their greatest fears is that they will be left behind.

The temptation may be great to send your pre-schoolers to a baby-sitter during the move, but children will feel a lot better if you let them stay with you. Let them pack and carry along some of their special possessions (do not discard any of them before they move, no matter how old and tattered they are).

Primary school-age children have a more highly developed sense of self since their world extends beyond the family circle. Their developing sense of discovery may make the idea of moving exciting to them. Although

they will be leaving friends, they won't be the deep, vital friendships of older children. The expressed concerns of a primary schooler usually deal with how well they will fit into where they are going.

The teenager, of course, usually has enough problems even in a stable environment. Social activities and friends have by this time overshadowed the family as sources of identity. Frank discussion with your teenager may provide clues on how you can help them without seeming too "pushy". Help them track down organisations and groups in the new area that are involved in activities that interest them. Encourage them to bring new friends to your home even if the house isn't yet as presentable as you might like.

When are we going to move?

One of the unfortunate myths about relocation says that school age children should

not be moved until school holidays. Many families have undergone considerable inconvenience just to avoid a school-year move, but a school holiday move may cause more problems than it solves since school provides a major orientation for children. As school is a primary source for making friends, a school holiday move will place your children in unfamiliar surroundings at a time when their chances of making friends are at a minimum. When school opens in the new term, they enter the first day chaos as a stranger. The teacher, meanwhile, facing a new class, may not be able to identify their discomfort and need for special attention.

A move during the school year, on the other hand, allows your children to go directly from one social setting into another. The children are new, so their classmates - and more importantly, the teacher - pay attention to them.

Curricula in the elementary grades in particular are flexible enough to allow school transfer with a minimum of academic problems. High school curricula are generally more structured which might cause some transitional academic problems. However, these difficulties would also be a problem in a school holiday move. The uncertain academic drawbacks of relocation during the school year should be weighed against the social problems a school holiday move is almost certain to cause.

