

# “The Impact of Moving on our Children”

Washburn Child Guidance Center

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When you think of moving in to your next home, what comes to mind? A bigger yard for the kids, that extra guest bedroom you've always wanted, the stress of packing or driving that huge U-Haul? Moving usually involves a mixture of excitement and anxiety – for the adults and the children involved. Change can be fun and exciting, but it is usually stressful as well. When families move, children are faced with many changes, such as moving to a new school, saying goodbye to friends, making new friends, getting used to a new teacher, new schedule, new house...the list goes on and on. “Most big life changes, such as moving, are both exciting and energizing, as well as stressful,” says Tom Steinmetz, Director of Programs at Washburn Child Guidance Center.

Children often show more through their play and their behavior than they are able to say verbally. Keep an eye on how your son or daughter is acting, playing and behaving, as well as what they're talking about, to see how they're experiencing the move. Many of the behavioral signs of worry or anxiety and excitement are very similar. These can include being more fidgety and active, having a harder time sleeping, and having a hard time paying attention or following directions. Here are a few ideas to help with the natural stress that's involved and, hopefully, to make your move as enjoyable as possible:

- **Try to see things in their perspective** – don't assume that just because you're happy about it, they will be too. At the same time, acknowledge their feelings rather than trying to immediately change their view. Instead of “It's all going to be fine, don't worry” statements like “You seem to be having a hard time falling asleep tonight. Are you thinking about moving?” are a good way to engage your children in conversations and acknowledge their feelings about moving.
- **Involve them in activities about moving** – try reading age appropriate books with your children about moving and feelings, such as *My Many Colored Days* and *Fritzzy Goes Home*. This will help them to understand that other kids have gone through the same thing. Also, activities like ring calendars (strips of construction paper taped into rings, with one ring for each day until the move) can help generate excitement and create a visual understanding of how long it is until “the big day.” Let your son or daughter help tape the boxes, pack sturdier objects like books and help with cleaning. Meaningful work helps children *and* adults soothe worry as well as giving the child a great feeling of accomplishment and involvement.
- **Let them know that saying goodbye doesn't mean saying goodbye forever.** If your child has a best pal at school, suggest keeping up monthly visits or starting a pen-pals relationship (depending on the distance of the move) in order to ease the transition.

Experiment and see what works best for your son or daughter. For some kids, it might just be a very new and exciting event to look forward to. Other children may have a harder time. Easily distressed children often experience the world differently from others. They can be even more sensitive to changes in their surroundings. If your child is more easily distressed, paying more attention to their physical settings and schedules can help ease the stress of moving. For instance, creating visual cues such as a posted schedule for the big day and labels on different areas of the home as well as (to the best of your ability) maintaining some type of defined schedule to which your son or daughter can easily adhere. These types of measures can help ease the transition and help prevent emotional outbursts. Some children may experience more severe adjustment problems. If your child's reaction seems severe or if the adjustment issues continue for what seems like an excessive time, you may want to seek professional help.

In the end, whatever the situation involves, moving means big changes in your child's life and the sooner you address these changes proactively, the better the outcome. Helping your child be involved with the experience

of moving and be able to share their thoughts and feelings about it with you can help make any move a better experience for everyone.