



# THE ABC'S OF RELOCATING CHILDREN

The U.S. Census Bureau stated that 9.1 million children relocated in 2013. Relocating with children is much more complex than simply moving oneself, which is hard enough! As a parent who has moved numerous times with children within the U.S. and Europe, I have seen firsthand how the words “we are moving” can evoke panic in children. When parents make the decision to move it is important that they tell their children as soon as possible. Give children time to adjust to the idea and encourage them to air their feelings and concerns; talk about the relocation as much as you can, reinforcing the positive aspects of the new location. Young children (ages 5–10) worry about some aspects that adults may deem insignificant, but don’t trivialize their feelings.

## Why are we moving?

Keep in mind that career moves do not mean anything to children so tell them, in terms they can understand, why you believe the decision is the right one for the family and how you plan to make the most of the move. If you have moved recently, another move may be more difficult to accept so be supportive, letting each child know that you understand his or her feelings.

Children, especially the very young, only identify with the world, as they know it: home, neighborhood, friends and schools. It is difficult for them to project themselves into a new home and city, aspects that are completely unknown to them. Therefore, work together to learn everything you can about the new community before you move. With the help of the Internet and NewMarket Services Guides, you can see and learn about communities, houses, schools, work places and much more. Learning about the city before you arrive will help everyone feel at home more quickly when you arrive.

Children who are frequent movers, such as some corporate and military families, may either take the move in stride or, depending on their current situation, seem devastated. I remember one intrastate move when our daughter had to forego a cheerleading position for which she had worked very hard and our older son had to give up a coveted position on his baseball team. We as parents were not too popular. However, the next move, which turned out to be only thirty miles from both grandparents, had a happy ending.

## **Timing of your move**

Children prefer starting school at the same time everyone else does – on the first day. However, there is no ideal time to enter a new school so don't be too concerned if your children cannot begin on the first day. New students may get lost in the shuffle in September whereas if they enter a few months later when school preliminaries have ended, then teachers can often provide them with more individualized attention. It is not so much the timing of the move, but how it is handled. If you do have an option for the timing of the move, then consider waiting until August. Summer can be very long without established friends or activities.

## **School Choices**

Each time we moved, our method was to select appropriate schools, and then home shop. Properties that sell well are typically in good school districts, so this method proved successful. Parents need to review their children's current educational materials, courses of study and educational plans before school shopping. Sometimes a subject is covered in a certain grade in one state, and a different grade in another state. Therefore, a child could arrive at the new school having missed an important part of his/her curriculum. We found this to be true during one of our moves when a math course had already been covered in the new school our son was to attend. We located a tutor so when our son started school, he was in line with his peers. I detail additionally important criteria to evaluate schools in our domestic book for adults, Relocation 101.

## **The Actual Move**

Children can feel threatened when they see moving personnel packing their favorite belongings and toys. Although they may be too young to understand the move, I still suggest having young children present during part of the packing to help them begin to comprehend the change. You can even assign them a few manageable chores.

## **Infants**

Ask a friend to take care of your infant while the movers are packing so you can concentrate on moving tasks, and the baby will be in a quiet environment. Infants will usually adapt the easiest to the new home, but you may notice changes to their sleep or eating patterns because babies can sense and react to your feelings and tension.

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# Preteens

These children have extended their horizons outside of the home. In 2005 BR Anchor Publishing conducted a school study by giving The League of Super Movers to 79 children in a North Carolina school. It is interesting to note that out of 79 students (81 percent) in the class, only 15 had never moved. This pre-adolescent age group is also preparing for the transition from elementary school to middle school. Studies by psychologists have shown that this transitory period can include lowered self-confidence, lessened interest in school studies and decreased motivation. Combining these typical emotions with the upheaval of relocation is a lot for preteens to manage.

## The Teenage Years!

Whenever possible, involve teens in the moving plans and decisions; having input with relocation decisions is important to this age group and helps teens develop a bit of excitement about their move. A teenager's biggest fear is usually to find and be accepted by new friends. The social climate varies from school to school, and teens worry about not knowing the "in" things at their new school. They may also want to hold off buying new clothes until after school begins so they can see what fashion modes the other students follow. Encourage teens to become active in the school's extracurricular activities such as sports and clubs. There are fewer students in smaller groups and striking up conversations can be less intimidating. Plus, it's easier to make friends with others who have similar interests and goals.

## Way Children Can Be Proactive

Involve children in moving tasks appropriate for their ages and allow them to have some control in the move. Having necessary tasks to complete will help them to believe they are important to the success of the move. Just a few practical ways they can help:

- Organize necessities and care for the family pet.
- Help younger siblings sort through their belongings for outgrown items.
- Complete one of the parent's many checklists.
- Mark items for a garage sale.
- Organize a travel bag or backpack with items they want to take on their trip.

While moving is usually a time for cleaning out and throwing away, it is important not to discard things that give children security or have special meaning to them. Let them sort through their own possessions, selecting the items that they want to keep or discard.

One of the most positive endeavors you can do with children, especially teens, is allow them to plan and decorate their own space. There are many inexpensive ways to make children's rooms exciting, such as using posters or mementos from the old and new schools or cities and favorite sports figures or events. Children will have ideas of their own as well. Even if their ideas do not mesh with yours, let them experiment. Decorating that doesn't permanently alter the room can go a long way in taking the edge off moving into a new home.

# Safety Tips

Have a “dry run” from the new home and school bus stop. Young children can get distracted or lose their way, so stress the importance of using the same route every day and coming straight home. This exercise will enable you to trace their path if they do not arrive home when you expect them.

Have your children learn your address and telephone/cell numbers by practicing writing and saying them. For children who cannot write, have them verbally practice your street address, city and state often. Make a game of it.

## Children’s Adjustment

Parents can usually tell at a glance if their children are experiencing problems; watch carefully for warning signals and address them early. Some signs that indicate children are not adjusting well:

- Sudden reading difficulties
- Changes in attention span or study habits
- Weight loss or gain
- Altered enthusiasm or energy levels
- Strained relationships with you or their siblings
- Disturbed sleep patterns.

Any of these signs could indicate that a child is struggling with an adjustment. Stay close to your children during the early months in a new location so you know how they are feeling, what they are thinking and who their new friends are. Volunteer at their new school if you can and interface with the teachers so you can see for yourself how your children are managing. Urge children to speak to teachers immediately if they cannot comprehend a subject’s material. Adjusting to a new school is difficult, and struggling in class will compound the situation.

## Maintaining Continuity

When parents move, they know they are responsible for the sad face sitting across the dinner table. When guilt feelings set in it is easy to become more lenient with household rules. However, this is not the time to do that. Relocation transitions are the most important times to maintain consistency with your children’s study expectations, chores, leisure activities and curfews. Let your children know that there will be continuity in your lives despite the change in address or country. Children thrive on stability and they will very quickly know when they can stretch the limits.

Studies show that if children are encouraged to express their feelings about a move, become involved in the process and learn about their new home, then they will deal with their move much more effectively.

BR Anchor Publishing's age-appropriate books for children, *My Family is Moving* (ages 5–8), *The League of Super Movers* (preteens) and *Footsteps Around the World* (teens) encourage children to learn about their move, become involved in the process and realize ways to manage change. The only way to really know whether a book helps a child is to put one in his/her hands. Since 1995, BR Anchor Publishing has conducted studies in schools in the United States and Great Britain using its children's books. The studies proved how the students perceived the books, and confirmed the positive impact they had on children of all ages. All studies can be read at [www.branchor.com](http://www.branchor.com) by clicking on any of these three books.

You may find it hard to believe as you are going through this process, but if moves are handled carefully and you take the time to listen and communicate often, then it will work out and you will all not only survive, but you will thrive and your children will probably tell you (later, as mine did) how they benefited from their experiences.

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