HELPING YOUNG CHILDREN COPE & LEARNING TO MAKE NEW FRIENDS

Moving can be difficult sometimes, especially for young children. Their home and the things around them are part of who they are—not just where they live. Often, they can feel like a piece of them is going away when they move.

Like many things in life, moving can bring a variety of feelings. It’s important to remember that moving can be sad as well as happy, as children and adults experience both the uneasiness of leaving the familiar behind and the excitement of new adventures. It might be hard, but it can help to share your feelings with your child, and explain that everyone in the family can have many different emotions. Remember, too, that it’s important to take care of yourself during the move.

PREPARING FOR THE MOVE

Talk About the Decision to Move
- Keep explanations simple and precise.
- Children ages 0 to five generally don’t understand how much change is about to happen. Describe the process in as much detail as possible.
- Talk about what things will go to the new home and what things won’t.
- Explain how you will be packing things in boxes.
- Read age-appropriate books that show and explain what will happen. Talk with your child about the pictures in the books and how he thinks the people in the pictures might be feeling.
- Be prepared to talk and listen—over and over again. This process can help make it real and signal to children that the move is actually going to happen.
- Take children’s concerns seriously. Treat feelings with respect, even when you can’t make things “better.”
- Expect that setbacks in behavior might happen. This is usually temporary. Comfort your child, and tell her that you know that she will be able to do the things she used to do before.
- Throughout the moving process, try to keep your family’s typical routines the same—for things like mealtime and bedtime. The structure of routines helps children feel secure.

Help Your Child Be Part of the Move
- If he’s old enough, let your child help you pack some of his personal belongings. Even young children can sort their toys and help wrap things in tissue paper or bubble wrap.
- Let your child help label her boxes so she can easily identify them. She might use stickers, draw pictures, or print her name on them, or even paste pictures of what’s inside.
- When packing, remind your child that his toys and other things will be away for a while, but they will be back soon in their new home.
• Hold off packing your child's favorite things for as long as you can, maybe even wait until the day of the move.
• With the use of technology, you might be able to show your child what her new home will look like. If possible, visit the new home and community with her.
• Let your child make some decisions about his space in the new home, like where to put his bed or toys.
• Find time for pretend play about moving. When children play about moving, they can practice what it feels like to move, and they can be in charge of what happens.
• Make time to have fun! Have a spontaneous picnic on a blanket in an empty room. Make a cozy corner with a blanket or sleeping bag for rest time.
• Set aside a time for saying goodbye. This might be a party, a small gathering, or visits with favorite people. Together, you can make an album of favorite people or places that your child can look at to keep memories alive.
• Reassure your child that you will always be there for her.
• Remember to give your child hugs and kisses, and say, “I love you.” There may be a lot of things changing, but your love for him stays the same.

IT’S MOVING DAY!

• Let children pack their own small box, duffel bag, or suitcase with their very special things that they can keep with them on moving day. These are the things you know need to be close by before, during, and immediately after the move.
• Have snacks, extra clothes, and wipes handy.
• Plan fun things to do while traveling.

Settling In

• Unpack your child’s room first. Let her help. Give her easy things to unpack and put away. Children like to feel important and helpful.
• Approach unpacking slowly. Too much clutter can add to the chaos.
• Put out familiar things, such as family photos or favorite kitchen or living room items, as soon as possible. This helps to make the new place feel more like home.
• Encourage more pretend play. The moving boxes can inspire such play, so don’t be too quick to toss them.
• Children gradually adapt to change so be sure to give them time to adjust. Again, expect that there may be some setbacks in behavior, like crying, thumb sucking, clinging, difficulty sleeping, or toileting accidents. These are ways children show that they want to go back to a time when things felt safer and more comfortable. This is usually temporary. Comfort your child and also tell him that you know he will be able to do what he used to do before the move, like sleep in his own bed.
• Find ways to help your child say hello to the new neighbors, or meet new people at school and in the community.
• Stay in touch with old friends with phone calls, letters, or through the use of technology.
WELCOME TO THE NEIGHBORHOOD!

Whether you’ve just moved to a new neighborhood or you’re welcoming a new family into your neighborhood, here are some things to keep in mind about fostering friendships between young children.

• When a new family moves into your neighborhood, you might want to welcome them with a card, information about upcoming activities in the community, or a list of some local favorite places: stores, parks, etc.

• If possible, set up a playdate with only one other child. Keep the visit short. Maybe plan an activity like making a simple snack together. Have the children help you. Some children feel uncomfortable at an unfamiliar home, so you may want to invite their parents, too.

• Learning friendship skills takes time. Sharing, taking turns, cooperating, managing arguments, and finding ways to solve problems can be enormous challenges for young children, whose view of the world is still quite self-centered.

• Suggest activities that are less likely to create conflict, like making a long paper chain or playing with things that are easily shared, such as play clay, blocks, or craft materials.

• When a friend comes to play, you might want to put away your child’s special toys. This can stop arguments from starting.

• Stay nearby or at least within ear range when new friends are playing together. Children’s conflicts can erupt suddenly, and it helps if you can address the conflict quickly.

• When there are disagreements, let the children know that you understand that sometimes people don’t agree. Encourage them to think of ways to work things out.

• Think of a time when you were a child and you had a disagreement with a friend and worked it out. Share that story with your child. It helps children to hear that their parents had to work at resolving conflicts, too.

Find more Daniel Tiger’s Neighborhood games and activities at pbskids.org/daniel