

Moving: Easing the Transition

When parents or caregivers think about stress in children's lives, moving to another neighborhood is not the first thing that comes to mind. But changing homes, schools, and friends can be very stressful. Some children embrace moving as an opportunity to make new friends and to learn new things; others get anxious or develop behavior problems.

It may take children and adults months to adjust after a move. For many children and adolescents, giving up the familiar—friends, favorite places, and routines—can be difficult. As parents focus on coordinating the moving process, some children react negatively to the decrease in attention. Children may experience anxiety and grief before, during, and after a move, and these emotions are intensified if moving results from major family disruptions, such as divorce or death.

Easing the transition to a new home is important for children. Some tips for parents include:

- **Involve children in the move as early and as much as possible.** Age-appropriate tasks or responsibilities can help children have a sense of control over their situation. For instance, younger children might be allowed to select where they would like to sleep, while older children might play more active roles in the selection of their new home.

- **Try to maintain daily routines.** While children are adjusting to new homes, neighborhoods, and schools, parents can provide some comfort by keeping some things the same. For instance, having the same nap times, morning and bedtime routines, and meal times might be comforting, especially for younger children.

- **Be patient with children and empathize with their feelings.** In some cases, children may not like their new schools, neighborhoods, or living arrangements despite their parents' best efforts. If this happens, parents should not become frustrated or angry. Instead, they should talk openly with children about their anxieties and reassure them that their



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feelings are normal. It will take some time to adjust to new surroundings.

- **Help children make new friends and get them involved in their new communities.** Participating in activities such as camps, after school programs, and neighborhood clubs is an excellent way for children to make new friends. Also, adults can use these activities to meet other parents in the neighborhood.

- **Visit new schools to see if orientation programs are available for newcomers.** These orientation programs can help alleviate many worries children have about their new school, such as knowing their way around and where their lockers are.

- **Look for warning signs of children not adjusting well.** Long-term anxiety, depression, significant disruptions in sleep, poor socialization, and falling grades may indicate that children need professional mental health services to help them adjust to their new environment. Seek help early.

The *Caring for Every Child's Mental Health Campaign* is part of the Comprehensive Community Mental Health Services for Children and Their Families Program of the Federal Center for Mental Health Services. Parents and caregivers who wish to learn more about mental well-being in children should call 1-800-789-2647 (toll-free) or visit www.mentalhealth.org/child to download a free publications catalog (Order No. CA-0000). The Federal Center for Mental Health Services is an agency of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.