Changing Schools

Tips to prepare your child for the transition.

So, your family has another posting?
Among other hassles that this event entails, there is that unenviable task of preparing your child for a change in school. Most children don't take kindly to the suggestion because it means a drastic upheaval in their lives. New friends, new teachers, new routine - all cause a subtle stress and anxiety in children. One of the biggest fears children harbour is whether they will find good friends in the new school and whether the new peer group will accept them.

Change is hard on some children.
While a transition causes temporary discomfort to most children, some are especially sensitive due to pre-existing factors. Stress in a child's life can impair a smooth changeover to a new school. And today's children are definitely under more stress. Children with chronic medical problems, attention deficit hyperactive disorder (ADHD) or learning disabilities may also need special help adjusting to a new school.

Prepare your children
The fears are inevitable but you can help ease them by preparing your child for the change. Here are some ways to make the transition easier

- Involve your child in the moving process from the beginning. Explain the reasons for your move and some of the benefits of the new posting location.
- Contact the REDLO to discuss schooling issues.
- See if the new school has a website that you can look at.
- Elaborate to your child those features of the new school that will be beneficial or enjoyable. Make the change seem a positive one.
- Hear your child out. Encourage him to express his feelings about leaving his friends and teachers behind. Don't oversimplify his anxieties. They are very real to him.
- Remember that periods of change and transition always involve adjustments and by being patient and supportive you can make this period smoother for your child.

Some more practical tips
- Arrange the originals and copies of all school records, reports and necessary certificates well in advance to avoid last minute hassles. Moving is chaotic business. Do not add to it by messing up your child's school records.
- Make sure that all information needed to enrol at the new school is carried with you and not stored in boxes that will follow at a later time.
- Make contact with the teachers at your child's new school. Discuss your child's strengths and weaknesses with them.  

Take the child to see the school before the starting day. If possible arrange a tour and have your child meet the teachers and principal.

Inform the school if your child has any special health problems or learning disabilities. Parents often shy away from this as they are scared the child will get labelled but not doing so will only deny the child necessary support when the need arises. Changing schools does not usually solve problems – they generally transfer with you!

Take an active interest in your child's school. Attend meetings, volunteer to help the teachers and show up for functions. You will meet new people and so will your child.

Get in touch with other children who attend the new school - especially those in your new street or neighbourhood. Create a buddy system, someone they can walk to school with and so help put your child at ease.

If your child will be riding a bus for the first time, take him on a bus ride or other means of public transport beforehand.

Assure your child that being anxious, nervous or excited about going to a new school are normal feelings. Try saying, “It’s only natural to be nervous” rather than, “Don’t be silly, there’s nothing to worry about.”

Remain calm and cheerful when tempted to fuss. If you are anxious, your child’s anxiety may be increased too.

Start a daily routine that builds in ample time for getting a good breakfast, packing school bags etc to avoid everyone rushing around and starting the day flustered.

Plan what to do in any emergency situation – if they miss the bus or you are prevented from picking them up. Perhaps a phone card and necessary phone numbers in a wallet or purse would be of assistance.

Encourage your child to join some group activities or clubs – the soccer club, the chess club or the computer club.

Friends are for keeps. Children need the security of knowing they still have old friends. Help them keep in touch via letters, phone calls, e-mail and, if possible, visits.

Let your children take simple photos of your new house, rooms, garden, nearby park or some attraction close by. This will familiarise them with their new neighbourhood and they will also have something to send back to their old friends.

Allow some time for children to settle in and teachers to get to know them then ring the school to discuss how they have settled.

If children are behind in any areas of their schoolwork you are probably eligible for the Education Assistance Scheme that Defence offers. You can be reimbursed for tuition that your child needs – ring the REDLO for advice and an application form.

Most importantly, reassure your child that you as a family are together in this period of transition and will sail through it smoothly.

For education information contact the Regional Education Liaison Officer (REDLO):
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