How to Make it Easier For Them
by Katharine Canfield

Moving can be as challenging as it is exciting. Sometimes more so. Moving is as hard for kids as it is for adults. They, too, are leaving behind familiar places and important friends. They, too, are starting over: seeking new friends and adjusting to a new home, neighbourhood, and school. But because they're still learning how to socialise and how to effectively get their needs met, children need caring adults to listen and help them adjust to their new home, now more than ever.

If you're a parent contemplating a move, this article's for you. By considering a move in three stages - before, during, and after - and thinking about your children's needs during each stage, you can make a big difference in how your kids feel about the move and how they adjust afterwards.

BEFORE THE MOVE:
Preparing
Tell your children about the move as soon as you can. The more time they have to think about and prepare for the move, the easier it will be for them. Give your children a chance to express their feelings, and try to be honest about your own feelings. Most children will feel some anger, sadness, or worry about the move. These responses are natural, and kids who have a chance to express them will work through their doubts more easily. Gently tell your children about any sadness you may feel about leaving or uncertainty about a new home, job, or city. This will reassure them that they aren't alone in having worries or concerns. Help older children prepare a list of phone numbers and addresses of close friends, relatives, and other important people in their lives. Knowing they can stay in touch with these people is an important part of a successful move.

If your kids are old enough, let them participate in decision making. Have the kids keep a notebook of potential new homes with the positives and the negatives listed. If you are able to, before you move take your children to your new home and explore the new neighbourhood and town or city together. If this isn't possible, take pictures of your new home, the schools your kids will attend, a nearby park, and anything else that would be interesting to them. Make a scrapbook containing pictures of your pre-move home, friends, and other mementos of your life together.

Call the principal of your children's schools, and try to set up a meeting with their teachers or, if they're in junior high or high school, guidance counsellor. The new school may even be able to give you names of students in your child's class who live near your new home. If so, you may want to drop by to meet them and their families before you move in.

Try to line up some activities in which your child can participate after the move: a sports team, music lessons, art classes, a scouting troop. Not only will activities like these keep your children involved; they'll also help them to feel like part of a group - an important aspect of settling in.

Try to sign up for more than one activity in case one falls through or doesn't go well. If you can, try to meet families in your new neighbourhood before you move. Being familiar with people when you move in will help your children feel more at home. (continued over)
DURING THE MOVE:
Remembering What's Important
Throughout the move, stay as upbeat and calm as you can; a good plan makes this possible. Your own mood will impact other family members, especially babies, who are particularly sensitive to their mother's feelings. With older children, it's important to be honest about some of the uncertainties you have, but also to be generally optimistic about the move and the positive ways it will affect the family. Involve your kids in the packing. Older kids can put their own belongings in boxes, and kids of all ages will enjoy decorating the boxes containing their things. Doing so will also make finding your children's things easier once you're at the new house!

Try to stick to your routines. Have meals at the same times as always. If your kids nap, encourage them to lie down at the usual time. Keep to the normal bedtimes. Don't pack things that your children treasure. Take special blankets, beloved stuffed animals, favourite books, and other prized items in a separate bag or box that you can bring with you in the car or on the plane when you go to your new home.

Help your children say good bye to the important people in their lives. For their friends, a pizza or make-your-own sundae party is a fun way to celebrate the friendship. An album or poster with photos of good times together will add to the celebration. If your children are comfortable, encourage hugs at the end of the party. With neighbours or other special adults, you may want to set up a time to stop by and say good bye as a family.

Expect the unexpected: few moves go smoothly, anticipate trouble (predict it!) and have a positive, "can do" attitude.

AFTER THE MOVE:
Getting Settled
Don't spend too much time unpacking - at least not right away! Sure, the essentials are important to unload and you want the house to feel settled. But wait on the less important stuff. In the first few days, take time to enjoy your new home with your family. Take walks. Check out local restaurants and take-out spots. Introduce yourselves to your new neighbours. Spend time at the park. Be on the look-out for neighbourhood kids, and help introduce your children to them. If it's comfortable for you and your children, invite some of the neighbourhood kids over for pizza or a video.

Let your children have some input in planning on the new house, especially in choosing things to buy for their rooms. Even if you don't follow through on their ideas, it's important to listen to what they think. Be tactful if you choose another option, and let some decisions be entirely up to them - for example, the placement of their bed or the colour of the rug or paint in their bedroom.

Get involved: church groups, synagogues, YMCA and activity clubs, etc. enable socialising. If a couple of months have gone by and your child seems unusually troubled, ask a doctor, guidance counsellor, or principal if you need a referral. Signs that your child may need help: unusual academic difficulty; ongoing irritability; trouble with peers; changes in sleep or eating habits; a generally despondent mood. Give them time, this behaviour can last for 4-5 months for teens.

Above all, listen. Try to be there when your kids get home after the first day at their new schools, even if it means having to leave work early that day. Regularly ask how things are going, and take time to listen. Sometimes kids have a hard time opening up; spending relaxed time together may help them to bring up whatever is on their minds. For children and adults, it takes time to feel at home. With your understanding and patience, your children will be reassured that, after a while, things will get easier; everything won't feel so new; and that home is, after all, wherever the family is.
MAKING FRIENDS

Choosing Friends - Before you make friends, you have to decide who you want to be your friends. Most people like to have friends who like to do the same kinds of things they do. That doesn’t mean you have to be exactly like each other, just that you enjoy some of the same things. If you’re really into sports, you probably will want friends who enjoy playing many of the same games you do. Likewise, if you love to read books, you will probably enjoy the company of readers. Forming a book club is a great way to get a group of kids together who share your interests. Think about your favourite things to do and try talking to your classmates at lunch or recess about your hobbies. You’re bound to find at least one person who’s excited about the same things that excite and interest you.

Making Friends - 1. The quickest way to make a friend is to smile. When you smile, people think you are friendly and easy to talk to. It may not be easy at first to smile. But, you can practice in the mirror. When you look at yourself, think if you’d rather talk to your smiling face or your usual face that may look scared or angry. Remember that other people have feelings too and most people will stay away from a scared or angry looking face. 2. One easy way to start a conversation with someone is to say something nice about them. For example, you could comment on a great answer to a teacher’s question, good catch at the ball field, pretty shirt, etc. Think about how great you feel when someone says something nice to you. Doesn’t it make you want to keep talking to that person? 3. Ask your new friends questions about themselves. Who’s their favourite singer, where do they live, who’s their teacher, what do they do after school are all good questions to start a conversation.

It’s not really nosey to ask questions about people. It’s the only way to get to know what they’re like. AND, it’s the only way they’ll know that you are interested in them. 4. Make sure you have something to add to the conversation too. When someone asks you a question, do have an answer for them. If you don’t know who your favourite singer is, or what your hobbies are, think about it. There’s nothing that will stop a conversation quicker than a shrug for an answer. You can get to know yourself by keeping a journal. 5. Shy kids often have some trouble with compliments. When someone says something nice, shy kids will often freeze in their tracks and say nothing. This leaves the other person wondering if they said something wrong. The best and easiest reply to a compliment is a simple "Thank You". 6. Be a friend. Kids who show an interest in other kids and who are kind and friendly make good friends. Remember, everyone wants to be around people who like to do similar things and people who are nice to them.

Activities - After you’ve made some friends that share the same interests, it’s always fun to plan activities together that you’ll both enjoy. Inviting a friend over to your house after school is a great way to make your friendship closer. If you know a game your friend likes to play, you can plan to do that together. If you and your friend like to play outside, think of some things you have around the house that you can organise to do outside. Make sure the activities can be done together. You may both love playing computer games, but this is activity best done alone or with a friend you’ve known for a really long time. When you play a computer game, one person is always left sitting with nothing to do but watch. Not fun.

(from www.shykids.com)
Changing schools
When your child is starting a new school, whether it's their first school, or making the leap from primary to secondary school, or because you've moved to a new area, it's only natural that they will feel a bit nervous. The anxiety isn't limited to the child either – plenty of mums and dads worry about how their child will get on and many primary school teachers have witnessed tears in a mother's eye when she leaves her five-year-old on their first day at school.

Try these 10 tips if your child is starting a new school:

1. **Find out about the new school**
   Contact the school and ask for information to be sent to you. Visit the school's website and discuss what is there with your child. Point out some features that you think will interest your child.

2. **Focus on the positives**
   Talk positively about moving to a new school and all the good things that it will mean, like learning new things and making new friends. "You'll be able to make lots of new friends – you're really good at that." Reminding your child about what they are good at will help them to feel more confident about going to a new school.

3. **Talk about their anxiety**
   If your child is nervous about starting at the school, reassure them that other kids feel exactly the same when they start a new school. If they are moving from another school talk about what you both will miss and how they could stay in touch with old friends or teachers they liked.

4. **Encourage extra-curricula activities**
   Some kids will do better at school if they get involved in school activities, clubs or sports. Talk together about new things they could try, or think of ways they can keep doing a favourite activity if it is not offered by their new school. Supporting your child to participate in school sports teams and cultural activities may help them fit in better at a new school.

5. **Get some good sleep**
   Try to encourage your child into their school-year sleep routine a week or two before they actually start. If your child is in the habit of going to bed late, it might take a bit of perseverance to get them to bed at a reasonable hour, but it will be worth it – it is more difficult for them to cope with new things like school if they haven't had enough sleep. (continued over)
6. **Have a practice run**

Before your child starts school, practice going through the routine of what will happen on a school morning. If you have older children at school, everyone will be familiar with the morning routine at home, but you'll probably still need to walk or drive your child to school or catch the bus with them on the first day. Make sure you and your child both know where to go and what to do on that first morning.

7. **Visit the school**

If it is possible do a couple of school visits a few weeks before starting is worthwhile. For younger children it is important that they become familiar with the school environment.

8. **Stock up on supplies**

Before the first day of school, find out what books, clothing and school supplies your child will need. If there is a uniform, or school sports gear is required, try to organise these in advance. Most schools can provide a list of things that are needed.

9. **Prepare the night before**

To avoid the morning rush, organise what you can the night before. Lay out clothes, make a lunch and put all the things for their first day into their bag. If your child is quite nervous, it might be better to do this after they have gone to bed or a lot earlier than the day before school. Other kids will quite happily get their things ready.

10. **Day 1**

Things always take longer than you expect, so, on the first day, try to get everyone up early to get ready and out the door on time. Encourage your child to eat a good breakfast and pack a healthy lunch and snacks to get them through the day. Most parents take their child to school on the first day, even older kids who are changing schools. Try not to be late - it will only make your child more anxious. If your child will normally go to school on a bus or walk, you might want to do this with them on their first day. Remind them also about what they are to do after school – where they are to go, who will meet them and what to do if things don’t go to plan.

And an extra tip – smile, don’t worry and be happy for your child!