Moving and Your Family

Ways to make a move easier on your family.
Moving is a major life change. It is an event filled with a variety of emotions. A move of choice may be viewed as a positive opportunity associated with feelings of excitement and anticipation. In contrast, a move without choice may be associated with feelings of fear, anxiety, and turmoil. Each family member may experience different emotions at different times. However, if relocation is approached with a optimistic attitude, it can promote family growth and involvement.
The couple relationship forms the foundation for a healthy family. The strength of this foundation is the key to family stability. During times of relocation children benefit from the security of their parents' love and support.

Suggestions for helping couples through the relocation process

- Focus on yourself. If you take care of your physical and emotional needs, you will be better prepared to help your family.
- Express and share your feelings, emotions, and expectations with your spouse.
- Recognise that your family may experience a sense of loss as a result of a move. It takes time to work through this loss.
- After the move, become involved in familiar activities.
- Maintain contacts with friends and relatives.
- Schedule time alone as a couple.

Suggestions for helping children through the relocation process

- Talk about the posting – early and often. Give your child as much information as possible before the move, as far in advance as possible; more lead time means more time for the child to get used to the idea.
- Encourage children to express their emotions. Accept their feelings and respond with understanding. By expressing your own feelings in healthy ways, children will recognise that they are not alone in their feelings.
- Encourage children to create a scrapbook of their former community, school, home, and friends. Allow children to maintain contact with former friends as long as necessary (telephone, mail, postcards, photographs).
- Be prepared for signs of stress from children of any age. Preschoolers may regress to thumbsucking, baby talk or other behaviour they had left behind. School-age children may intensify natural habits: a shy child may become more shy, an aggressive child more aggressive.  

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• Involve children in some of the decision-making. Keep options within your range of acceptability while giving your child a sense of participation. Be prepared to honour their decisions
• Read stories about moving to younger children. Use a toy truck or dolls to act out the packing and moving process.
• While packing for the move, respect your child's need to keep some items before you throw them away. These items may represent security to your child.
• Host a farewell party for the children. Plan the party with a theme in mind that connects with the new location (landmarks eg Sydney Harbour Bridge, state flower, sport team, etc.). Create activities that focus on moving, for instance, "Pin the House on the State." Invent a new form of transportation, and/or draw and decorate the child's new bedroom.
• Schedule time for family fun and exploration of the new community soon after you move. The local Family Liaison Officers (FLOs) at the Defence Community Organisation (DCO) will have some great ideas!
• On moving day, keep some special items (favourite doll, toy, teddy, blanket, etc.) with you for ready access.
• When arranging your new home, organise the children's room first so they will have a safe place during all the chaos. Place household items in familiar places as much as possible.
• Resume normal family routines as soon as possible (bedtime, chores, discipline, traditions). Children benefit from a sense of security, structure, and things that are predictable.
• Encourage opportunities for making new friends through neighbourhood, school, church, and familiar extracurricular activities.
• Don’t expect children to go to a new school or child-care immediately after a move. They will need time to get used to their new surroundings, and some special attention from you, before facing the next big challenge.
• When the child starts school go with him or her. Meet as many teachers as you can and ask to introduce your child to the principal.
• Contact the school after a few weeks to see how the child has settled in.
• If teachers are concerned that the child is behind in schoolwork remember the Education Assistance Scheme that Defence offers. Contact the REDLO for any advice.
• Children need time to adjust. Do not become over-concerned about signs of regression to earlier developmental stages or to early reactions to moving. In general, it takes children at least six months to adjust to a move. However, be alert to signs of depression (mood swings, despair, changes in sleeping and eating). Contact your school counsellor and other mental health professionals for assistance.

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