

## KIDS ON THE MOVE

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Our six-year-old's tears became a river when we left our Paris posting last spring. She was miserable at the thought of leaving her first school, dearest friends and familiar surroundings. Almost a year later in Ottawa, she has a new house, new friends, new school... and an old ache in her heart. When a neighbour asked last week where we might go on our next posting, she blurted out "Paris!", without a moment's hesitation. She may have made the physical move, and though, outwardly appears happy and adjusted, she stills feels the old wounds time had not yet healed - the move was wrenching for her.

Could we have done more to help her adjust to the new posting? We think we did our best in helping both her, and her three-year-old sister, to cope. But if you're also wondering how to tackle this problem, here are my suggestions.

Make sure your family hears about the move from you, and not from a friend or neighbour. The focus of a wee one's world is the family, and it's therefore very important for parents to present the move in the best possible light. Of course there will be people and things you adults will regret leaving as well, but the more upbeat and enthusiastic you can be about the move, the more your family will follow your lead.

Don't expect little ones to absorb all the implications of a move all at once. It may take them some days or weeks to realize that moving means they'll be leaving their play group, and won't see the kids next door any more. It's a time for extra patience if there's some anxious bed-wetting, and some indulgence too... a trip to a favorite recreation area before leaving, and some sight-seeing when you arrive at your new post.

Whether you are going abroad or bringing kids to Ottawa for the first time, get as much information as you can about the new post and show your kids maps

and pictures of where you are going. This is no time to throw out familiar, comforting toys or trinkets so resist the temptation to chuck everything in the kid's closets when packing up. In unfamiliar surroundings, they'll treasure their threadbare teddy and old storybooks.

At post, get the kids involved in play groups and activities as quickly as possible. This may mean setting your own timidity aside in order to make contact with other mothers and arrange outings for your kids. Some of my most enduring friendships in Paris were struck-up on park benches when I dared to chat to other mothers of the sandcastle set.

Help your kids build a "memory bank" of their current home by collecting photos of bedrooms, of friends, teachers and favorite haunts. While it's tempting to make promises you can't keep just to dry the tears ("Yes dear, you'll see your friends again very soon...") it isn't wise to mislead your kids now, and then expect them to trust you in the future. Help them ease the hurt of saying goodbye by having a farewell get-together with friends. Take the addresses of their closest friends, and WRITE. This means more work, of course, if the bosom buddies aren't at a letter-writing age... it's up to mom or dad to take down dictated notes to friends and enclose photos occasionally... but your reward is your child's beaming face when they get a letter in return!

The public library has good books on moving that will help young children realize that change isn't all that bad: Moving by TV's Fred Rogers, a picture book for tots; Maggie Doesn't Want to Move, by Elizabeth Lee O'Donnell, for ages four to six; and Things to Know Before You Move, by Lisa Ann Marsoli, for the six to 10 set. Above all, be careful not to brush-off a young one's anger or anxiety about a move. Listen, empathize, and do all you can to help them participate in the move and look forward to the change, rather than dreading it.