



Moving With Teens

Moving with Teenagers in Tow is a Challenge, but All You Need is a Little Preparation and Some Patience

Getting your teenager out of bed in the morning can be an exhausting drama. So how on earth are you going to get them to leave their friends, their school and the only home they've ever known? The answer: not easily. But with the right mix of sympathy, patience and cajoling it doesn't have to be a disaster.

Why Teens Have More Trouble

Relocation is hard on adults and kids. But for teenagers the transition is tougher. Teens confront a host of social and psychological issues that younger children and adults don't. Thus they're probably going to be much more reluctant to go along with a move and much more vocal about their objections.

When your teen hears that they have to move, the first thing they're likely to think is that moving will separate them from their friends. During junior high and high school, adolescents put a tremendous amount of time and energy into finding just the right peer groups. Even if it seems that they have a new best friend every month, the process of reaching out to other teens and learning how to socialize consumes an inordinate amount of their energy (and, when the phone bill comes, your income). Through this laborious process of "fitting in" teens are forming their own identity. Especially if they don't have much experience with relocating, teens define themselves by who their friends are, where they hang out and what they do for fun. It shouldn't be much of a surprise, then, that teens get very upset when they hear they have to leave all of the above behind. By having to adjust to an entirely new town, school and social scene teens have to go through the awkward process of fitting in all over again.

There are a host of other reasons that relocation gets under your teen's skin. Teens crave predictability. During adolescence everything is changing: their voice, their clothes, their responsibilities.

Against that backdrop, having a stable, familiar home and social life makes a real difference. Moving throws this all into flux. Teenagers also like to think of themselves as adults. When mom or dad tells them the family is moving and that's that, teenagers feel, quite acutely, how far they actually are from full adulthood.

As melodramatic as teenage angst may seem, ignoring or minimizing the real difficulties that moving presents to teenagers only makes them worse. To help your teens make the transition as smoothly as possible, parents have to know when and how to intervene and when to back off.

What You Can (and Can't) Do

If your teenager is incessantly whining, trying to talk you out of moving or just stomping around the house slamming doors, it's easy for you to get frustrated with their reactions. The most important thing you can do, however, is engage their concerns and feelings. Like most problems teenagers confront, simply listening to them – without trying to argue or make a point – can do a world of good.

Relocation is a long process and throughout there are steps you can take (and a few you shouldn't) to help minimize stress on your teen. Some of the more helpful are listed below:

First, don't automatically assume your son or daughter is unhappy about moving. Though a lot of teens are hurt and angry, others look forward to the new start.

If your teen is upset don't let it make you feel guilty. Eventually your kids will accept the necessity of relocation – they're more resilient than you think. In the meantime, if they sense that you're uncertain about moving they'll be even more anxious.

If possible, try to schedule your relocation around the academic calendar. Leaving after classes have let out for the summer is less disruptive – to their school grades and social life – for your teenager than leaving in mid-semester.

If your son or daughter is a senior in high school, consider leaving them with relatives or a trusted friend until they

graduate while the rest of the family moves. Trying to adapt to a new school that late in the game may not be worth it.

Before you leave town schedule a time in the not-too-distant future when your teen can return to visit. If relocation doesn't seem as permanent, your teen will have an easier time letting go.

The less your teenager knows about where it is they're moving, the more anxious they'll be. Together with your teen, try to find out as much as possible about your new hometown.

If you'll be hunting for a new home, factor your teen's preferences into your decision to buy. This can make them feel their needs are important to the family.

Once you get settled, make sure your teen has plenty of ways to access their old friends: this can mean getting an internet connection set up, buying into a cell phone plan, etc.

Get involved in the social and community life of your new hometown as soon as possible. Join a religious congregation, enroll in youth sports or encourage your teen to get involved with extracurricular activities. All these can help plug your teenager back into the social network they feel they've lost.

If you have younger children, assign your teen to look after them during the moving process. In addition to making your life easier, it can help keep your teen from fixating on their own dilemma.

Watch carefully but don't worry too much. It's perfectly natural for your teen to act mooney and dissatisfied in the weeks and months after moving. More often than not all they need is space, and time, to get adjusted. Keep tabs on them: if their school grades start to slip, or if they don't show any interest in socializing, seek professional help. Otherwise let them find their own way.