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on health, emotions, and life.



## **The Moving Blues**

Caroline didn't want to move. It had been hard enough to make the transition from junior high to high school, especially when many of her friends went to different schools. Now she liked her friends, she liked her school, and she liked her routine. She didn't want to leave the big city for a small town and felt angry with her parents and out of step with everyone else.

It isn't easy for anyone to pack up and leave everything that is familiar and try to fit into a new environment. But it's especially hard during a time in your life when there are already so many physical and emotional changes taking place.

### **Why Do I Feel Upset About Moving?**

Experts consider moving to be one of the major stresses in life. Leaving behind friends, familiar places, and activities creates anxiety for everyone involved — parents included. And it's hard work to pack and prepare for a move and then settle into a new home.

The reasons behind a move can sometimes be upsetting, and that can add to the stress. A parent may be forced to take a job in a new town because of company layoffs or staff reorganizations. Sometimes a death or divorce in the family can lead to a move, or your family may have to move to take care of a sick family member, such as a grandparent.

During the busy, stressful time of planning, preparing, and packing for a move, your mom and dad may be too preoccupied to realize how the change is affecting you. They may not even realize you are unhappy if you don't discuss it with them. Be open with your parents and try to talk reasonably about the move and how it is affecting you. Your parents or siblings may have the same concerns or fears.

A move can lead some people to become depressed. If you find that you can't shake feelings of sadness or anxiety, talk to an adult. Don't worry that your parents are too focused on organizing their own lives and don't worry that you'll be bothering them. Most parents appreciate knowing how you feel. Or you can talk to your brother or sister or a school counselor. Not dealing with feelings now may lead to problems later.

It can help to remember that the problems involved in moving are always temporary. People usually feel better once they've had time to settle in.

### **What to Expect**

Even when the reasons for a move are good (such as a promotion or better job for a parent) and you're excited about it, it's still a good idea to be prepared for unexpected changes. It's easy to get caught up in the excitement and expect everything to be perfect.

Ali remembers her move to Germany. Like many military families, she'd moved many times before so it seemed like no big deal. In fact, Ali was so excited at the prospect of living abroad that she didn't think about the challenges involved in living in a place where she didn't speak the language. She was also surprised by some of the cultural differences — things she hadn't anticipated because

she'd assumed that Germany would be pretty much like the United States. Today she says she makes a list of positives and negatives before she moves to help keep her expectations realistic.

One unexpected difference may be school. It's easy to assume that one school is pretty much like another, but your new school may not use the same textbooks or procedures. Some of your classes may be different, or the teacher may have already covered topics you haven't learned about yet. It can be particularly hard if you're moving in the middle of a school year, but your teachers will understand and work with you to be sure you feel comfortable.

It's common for people who move to feel like they're starting all over again. You have to learn new streets, new faces, and new ways of doing things. People may dress or speak differently. The slang and accents may sound different in your new community, depending on how far you move. It's natural for people to feel out of place in a new situation where they don't know the customs and rules.

### **Making the Best of It**

Although there is no way to eliminate the anxiety of moving, there are many ways to make the move easier. Before you even begin packing, you can start to get to know your new home. The Internet and library may contain lots of good information about your new community. Make a list of your interests and hobbies, and then find the locations and phone numbers of places where those activities take place. When you're visiting your new school, find out if there are deadlines for activities you're interested in and see if you can still join.

A new place seems more familiar, and it's easier to make friends, when you can participate in a common interest with people who do the things you enjoy.

Look for opportunities to try new activities as well. If you have a job, ask your current boss to write a reference letter for you. If you work for a food chain or a chain of stores, you might be able to arrange a transfer and have a job waiting for you.

See if you can get a city map and highlight where you will be living, where your new school is, and the location of places of worship, movie theaters, skate parks, and other places you like to go. Ask if your realtor can videotape your new house if you haven't been able to see it yet (most realtors post indoor and outdoor pictures of properties online).

It can help to learn about what makes your new city or town unique. Share the information with your friends and make them feel part of your moving experience. Soon you will feel like you already know your new community.

### **Packing It Up**

You can pick up a copy of the United States Postal Service Mover's Guide in any post office or online; it will give you and your parents some tips. The guide includes change of address forms, a checklist of things to do, and suggestions for a survival kit that will contain items you may need to have at hand and might otherwise be packed out of reach during the move.

You can help — and feel more in control — by making a list of things that need to be done before the move. Offer to help your parents with some of their items. The more you participate and keep busy, the more it will feel like your own experience rather than something that is being done to you. For example, organize a yard sale to sell the stuff you don't want to take with you. You may find that friends and neighbors are interested in participating in a yard sale, too.

As soon as you know you are moving, start preparing by:

- Sorting out clothes and giving away items that you aren't going to take
- Packing away items you are going to take, but won't need until after you've moved

- Spreading out the chores you have to do so you won't be overwhelmed during the last few days
- Cleaning up your room or any other areas you are responsible for to make packing easier
- Labeling your boxes so you can easily identify where things are when you get to your new home

### **Keeping in Touch**

One of the fears of moving is losing old friends. Remember your friends when you get to your new destination by putting pictures up around your new room. Print out copies of pictures for your friends to keep, too.

Saying goodbye is never easy, but it doesn't mean it's forever. Luckily, today it's easier than ever to stay in touch with social networking sites and IM. Share pictures and videos. Let your friends know about the differences, both good and bad, between your old home and your new place. You might be able to plan summer visits to see old friends or for a friend to visit you.

Moving is hard, but you may discover that it has taught you some valuable skills: how to make new friends, be flexible, and find your way around strange places. Although learning these lessons can feel tough at the time, once you've settled in, you may find you like the new place better. And be sure to say "hi" to the next new kid in town — you can relate.

Reviewed by: D'Arcy Lyness, PhD

Date reviewed: September 2010



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