

## Does Moving Have a Harmful Impact on Children?

In today's society of downsizing and mergers, families often face the prospect of moving to find or keep their jobs. According to recent U. S. Census Bureau data, each year more than 9 million children are uprooted as 17 percent of American families change residence. Is this harmful to children?

In seeking the answer to this question, research has shown that:

- Moving can produce effects later in life for at-risk children who lag in school, have social adjustment problems, or who move because of family crises such as divorce.
- Among most children, moving strains are often short-term, although adolescents are hit hardest.
- At-risk children given specialized attention in their new school adapt better than those left to fend for themselves.

Adolescents appear to be affected most because of the importance of peer relationships during this time. The researchers found that adolescents were concerned most about leaving friends and not graduating from high school with their old classmates. In addition, adolescents who felt rejected after a move were found to lose self-esteem and were then less likely to participate in extracurricular activities, thus further isolating themselves in the new community.

However, these researchers point out that parents must be cautious about overestimating the risk of moving. In general, the short-term strains of moving disappear, so parents shouldn't overreact, such as by holding their child back a grade in the new school if the child's grades are fine.

Suggestions for adults when re-locating a family:

- Give adolescents three months' notice of an upcoming move;

- Minimize other upheavals in family life;
- Involve the children in the move with projects, such as gathering information about the new location;
- Move during the summer, if possible, to minimize school stresses;
- Be aware of your own stress level and don't take on more than you can handle; and
- Help teenagers explore social opportunities in the new environment and resist the temptation to be overprotective.

(Source: "Moving Appears Hardest on Adolescents." *APA Monitor*, August 1996, p. 10.)

### Source of This Document

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