

Move on up! BY HELEN ROBERTS



Moving house is considered to be one of the most stressful events you can go through in life and can be unsettling for young children too.

Helen Roberts reports in-between unpacking boxes . . .

First of all I feel the need to mention that we moved house only two days ago so please bear with me, it's a major achievement that I found my computer!

I suggested I'd write my article for this issue on how to help children enjoy the excitement of a move with the minimum of upset when 'we' decided that we were moving house. I say when 'we' decided but the decision to move house is made by adults and in this case was made by myself and my partner. My daughter's initial reaction to the news was of excitement and, now we have moved, so far so good but it's very early days. I don't profess to be an expert but, what I can do is share with you how we got this far and tried to make things as easy for my daughter as possible.

• **Why is moving house stressful for a child?**

Moving house is a big upheaval for the entire family but a child can feel powerless because our boys and girls cannot and in most cases should not, influence that decision. Whether it's a need for more space, a change of job, scenery or driven by economics there's a million and one reasons why we decide to move but it's rarely because the children decided.

Research shows that moving house is one of the greatest stresses we face in our lives. Its capacity to cause psychological distress comes only after losing a close relative in terms of severity, and ahead of illness, loss of employment and divorce. All concerned often underestimate the degree of stress involved in moving. Of course managed well, distress is not necessary the outcome.

• **How can the move be made less stressful?**

As the experts suggest we decided that the sooner we told my daughter that we were moving the better. We told her before Christmas to give her as much time as possible to get used to the idea. We were fortunate that we were able to make frequent visits to the new house and spend time in the area which is only a short journey away from our old house.

Even though a child can't choose which house to buy or which town to move to, they can get involved in other ways like choosing colours to decorate rooms. That way they will feel part of the process. My daughter's room was the first to be finished. My mantra has been if she's happy we're happy. My partner and I keep popping in to take a break from the unpacking elsewhere!

Getting her involved in packing and sorting through things was useful to help her see the process though. But after a while she was bored so we enlisted the help of friends and family to help entertain her whilst we got on with the hard work. I highly recommend this where possible.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) has revealed that

- More than one in ten people in our region move house at least once a year.
- Manchester remains an extremely popular city amongst first time buyers and is extremely successful in attracting young professionals into the area.
- South Manchester, offers a good supply of semi-detached, terraced properties and flats and remains extremely popular with first time buyers and young families. Most popular areas are Chortlon, Didsbury and Whalley Range. Demand for school places is high in these areas.

• **Moving school age children**

We were positive about the move and encouraged her to ask questions. This is of course easier for a seven year old than a younger child.

My daughter doesn't have to change school, which will make the move a lot easier for her. However I went to three different primary schools as a result of moving house when I was a child so have some idea of some of the pitfalls.

The big question is, will they like their new school and make friends? It takes time is all I can say. Experts claim that it can take children around six weeks after starting a new school to get used to things. Getting to know a child's new teachers and school and making them aware of the situation is important.

If a child finds it difficult to adjust to new surroundings and shows signs of real distress in some cases it can be necessary to enlist in professional help but, this is rare.

• *Moving children under five*

In my view smaller children are easier to move. They rely on their parents for their sense of security and feel safe as long as parents are around. You can tell small children stories about moving and explain when their toys are being packed that they are being put in boxes to take to the new house.

Avoid new beds or furniture if possible. When we moved to Manchester my daughter was four and familiar things helped her feel better.

• *Our moving day*

It was a nightmare. The removers arrived an hour early but better than late I suppose. My daughter insisted on watching them load the truck at our old house whilst stood under an umbrella in the rain. She then watched them unload the truck at the other end. As we started to get things sorted she grew bored but fortunately a friend asked her to go and play for an hour so we could make one last journey to the old house to

check we hadn't forgotten anything. We then collected her so she could say goodbye to her old room.

As we drove away for the last time her goldfish in a bucket on the back seat of the car and the hamster in the boot was something I will never forget.

• *Now*

A move may turn out to be a positive experience for the whole family, provided they go about it the right way. From where I'm sitting it's too early to tell although I'm sure we'll be fine. I can't believe how much stuff we have. My daughter had at least fifteen boxes of toys. We have a similar amount filled with books and DVDs.

This was the fourteenth time I've moved house and I should be an old hand by now but, I don't think it ever gets any easier. Also, moving is obviously a completely different experience when you have children to consider. At this moment in time I don't want to ever move again. But who knows.

One of the most important pieces of advice I have for the adults is, just make sure you know in which box to find the bottle opener and the booze! **MD**

Books for kids on moving

Moving Molly (Red Fox Picture Books) paperback By Shirley Hughes
Goodbye House (Moonbear Books) paperback
The Suitcase Kid (Corgi Childrens) paperback

Spring into action & help save resources



With Spring well and truly 'in the air' – okay, it may snow tomorrow but in Britain we're well-used to four seasons in one day – perhaps now's the time to set about de-cluttering the family home.

Before long, we'll be rummaging through over-full garages, sheds and workshops; searching for gardening tools; kids' toys, bikes, patio furniture and even the portable barbecue that we know is somewhere - but where? How often is heard, 'If we hadn't amassed so much stuff, we'd know where the really important things were'... only to re-stack forgotten items, in preparation for never using most of them again.

We see discarding useful products, with years of life in them, as something to be avoided – then hoard. When in reality, we could pass them on to others who would maximise the life of our unwanted treasures.

Now there's a way to clear valuable space for you, while helping your community. Margaret Graham from Didsbury, a founder of www.netbootsale.co.uk puts 'searchers' in touch with 'providers', enabling those with something to offer, to donate what they no longer need for others to utilise. What's more, it's free - no money ever changes hands – safe, and is beneficial for the environment. It's that simple, just log on and start recycling.

