

12 Steps to Moving & Changing Schools

We have moved several times – alone, with our one kid, then our two kids.

Moving feels different for kids than it does for adults. And kids of different ages will experience it differently. Thinking it through, and talking it through together, will help you frame your move as a fun family adventure worthy of a school writing assignment rather than a traumatic event.



Most recently, we made the mistake of talking to the kids about moving to a new state before we had fully decided. And it was to be our decision – they didn't help us decide; it was a thorny issue that the adults had to decide. But the very early introduction of a move meant that the whole project was protested before it began. Learn from our mistake and don't jump the gun too far in advance, haha! However, I do feel that honesty is important, even if it's hard.

We have an anxious kid and have learned that laying it down with no drama, and not bringing our own anxieties to the table, allows him the chance to be less anxious. Social stories and other forms of storytelling, books, and movies of course help kids of all ages understand and come to grips with moving.

I have collected moving-related book and movie titles for all ages, free printables, moving tips and hacks, and other items to help you make this move a fun family adventure. This mini-course has an accompanying Pinterest board and you should have received an email inviting you to access, and add to, the secret board. If you've lost track of that email, just contact me [on Facebook](#) or [by email](#).

Just take one thing at a time, and share that as a family, you'll also take one thing at a time together.

1. Review all the things that will be the **same**: we'll keep the pets; we will all stay together, so when we get the new house you'll still have your bedroom set, toys, clothes, books, parents, siblings. We'll still visit your relatives or grandparents every summer (or: we'll still have Sunday dinners with them), chores, bedtimes, the big brown couch, our family photos, your 'spot.' We will still have family game night and our other weekly traditions. You'll still be able to smell the rain when it comes, and we'll still have our secret family recipe for your birthday cake. You'll have your favorite sweater, all your stuffed animals, your comforter, books, and your bike. We'll have the same spiritual and birthday traditions. The cats will have their old cat tree. Prepare a list before you talk with them and ask

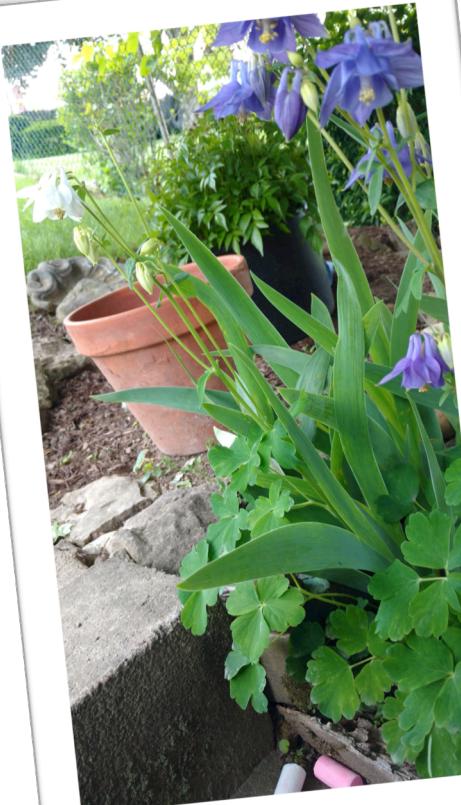


them what they think you might have forgotten. Be aware that anxious kids may need down time to process the news, or additional help from you or their support folks.

Sensory-seeking kids may need extra input, too – more trampoline time, or try a weighted blanket or body sock to help them feel together. My Thing 2 needs regular wrestling, tickling, and “steamrolling,” for example. And stay checked in with support folk about the issue as well: teachers, therapists, confidantes, grandparents.

2. Talk about all the things that will be **different**: The house, the yard, the garden, the neighborhood, the town, the school, library, teacher, and your favorite greengrocer. We'll be closer to your grandparents, or we'll live with them for a month while we look for a house... Work on familiarizing them with the equivalents of these things before you move. (More on that in number 4.) When discussing the differences, be sure to include and celebrate the cool things! We'll be closer to the ocean, or the mountains! The new house has an extra room for Nanny to visit or a cool reading nook; this school is closer to home or has more clubs. You can pick the color of your new room! Don't forget the fun and adventure part of the move.
 - a. Ask them what they will **miss**, and let them feel all the feelings. Just mirror them back, “I hear you, that'll be hard to give up on your tree house or your little garden in the

back. But, yeah, it'll be nice to get away from the bully down the street." Whatever they say, just sit with them and acknowledge their feelings. Resist the desire to fix it or say something to make it better. Just let them experience being heard and understood. Let them feel all the feelings. If you can sit with their anxiety, they will begin to learn to do that as well. They learn more from what we do, not what we say.



- b. Talk about how you'll **remember** and keep in touch. Will you come back and visit? Will you email friends? Skype or face time with friends or family? We don't say "goodbye" the way we used to. Get them little photo albums from the dollar store. Let them take pictures to print and save in the albums – friends, the garden, the dog next door, the reading nook in the library. Perhaps they will want to make one for a special friend as well. You can record sounds that you want to remember, too. Water, birds, church bells, the ice cream truck. *I have ended many a bedtime story with an update to 'happily ever after' for the modern age: "And they all kept in*

touch with Facebook, the end." They laughed the first dozen times....

They are bound to have a range of feelings, and your first job is to allow those feelings and listen to them or help them in expressing them if they don't have the language. Then acknowledge the feelings, tell the kids that having an emotional response is totally normal, that feelings do pass, and that you'd like to strategize about how to make them feel better. Then strategize as a family, one-on-one, with help from a professional, or all of the above.

3. Make a **plan**. Talk about time, and go step by step. Make a visual and age-appropriate calendar – target your youngest kid and perhaps even scale it a little younger. You know how kids love their old comforting books, shows and stuffed animals when they are upset? Keep that in mind as you make your plan visual and share-able. Anxious, sensitive, sensory, autistic, nonverbal, and younger kids will greatly benefit from a visual calendar. So will harried parents! ☺

Put a large 3-month or 6-month or even yearlong paper or laminated calendar within their sight, mark packing days, last day at the old school, any summer camp time, moving day, driving time, if you're staying somewhere in between (Grandma, friend, apartment) mark that span of time with a highlighter, unpacking time, and any other days in between – any family outings, dad's coming home from deployment, Nanny is coming to help decorate, whatever it is. There are some examples of visual calendars on [our pinterest board](#).

Particularly full weeks or even days may need their own visuals to guide the family step-by-step. When my more anxious kid was young, we had daily photos attached by Velcro to a 7-day weekly calendar to mark which days he'd be at school (a photo of the outside of the school, a photo of the teacher/s, and a photo of him playing with other kids) and which days he'd be at home (picture of the outside of our house, him at his desk, him with the cat, family pictures on the weekends). After each day was done, we'd take the picture down and look at what was coming tomorrow.

For long-term calendars, add on school orientation dates, and of course the first day of school. Add in school open house, first club meeting or sports practice, things they are looking forward to. Then cross off days as you go. Add to the fun by making a bubble wrap calendar ([it's on our pinterest board](#)) and “pop” the days as you go!

4. Tell them before **the “For Sale” sign** (or “For Rent”) gets mounted in your yard, and let them know that potential buyers or renters will be coming to see the house. Explain to them that you’ll need to leave the house when folks come to look at it. Tell them what you expect from them in the process, sign the “Kids Listing Agreement” included in this packet and decide what reward they will get for their help. Keep your spontaneity in your pocket and pull it out when needed... in our experience, agents may give very short notice, and we even had a few show up at the door with house-hunters in tow! A great excuse for popping out for an ice cream or packet of sunflower seeds, heading to the dollar store, library, or grocery

store. Or even a walk around the block. Anxious kids may want a step-by-step plan for any last-minute exits. (Or pack a comfort kit: stuffed animal, favorite book, binkie if appropriate, a snack and a bottle of water.) Make an adventure out of it.

5. Have them **help pack and label** the boxes (do not forget to label the boxes, trust me!) in any way that is both helpful and age-appropriate. Tossing stuffed animals or bedding or shoes in a box, labeling boxes, or choosing the top ten toys to NOT

pack. Tweens and teens can pack their own rooms with directions like “start with toys you are ready to donate, then move to toys you’ve aged out of but want to keep, trophies, books you don’t currently need, and then move to out-of-season clothes. And labeling. Always label, do you hear me? Label!”



Prioritize the boxes that contain what you'll need the first night... inhalers and other medicines, night lights, stuffed animals, toilet paper, pajamas, noise machine, perhaps even bedding. Put those in the car or put them in the moving van last so they'll be the first out. On the other end, build in or allow time off school until the unpacking is finished if at all possible. A new school will feel better, especially for anxious kids, if they come home to a predictable, fixed environment. Decide in advance which rooms you will unpack and put

together first: kids' bedroom(s), living room, or dining room, depending on where you spend the most time as a family.

6. **Visit** your new town or neighborhood before you move. Go to a service in a house of worship you may attend in your new area. Visit the new library, the Y or gym. Take the dog to the dog park. Listen to local radio stations. If at all possible, send the kids to summer camp in the new area or find some school-sponsored summer activities; eat at the same restaurant two or three times during your visit(s), building up familiarity and comfort. Make a friend, keep in touch with that friend until you move and check in with the friend a couple of times before school starts. If not a real live person, reach out to find a pen-pal through boy scouts, First Lego League, brownies, or the teacher your child will have.

If you live states away or in the neighboring town, and you cannot visit, you can still do lots of digital scouting -- find photos and videos online of all the new places they'll **get to** go. You'll undoubtedly find pages for the new state and town. Look at the new house, school, playground, parks, and work place(s) on Google earth.

Do lots of research on the new school, and look at it all with the kids more than once. Map out the walking route to school and



follow along on satellite maps, or look at the bus stop nearest your house. Make a “cool places to check out” list that you can use to explore once you get there.

7. **Find a daycare (or school) you believe in fully** and translate those feelings of excitement and trust to your kid. *Choosing a daycare accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children helped us move from our initial parenting experiences in a heavily regimented Neonatal Intensive Care Unit out into the big scary world. Having and knowing the rules helped me keep my own anxiety under control. It also helped my kid adjust to the new place, knowing that I believed it was a great, fun, safe place.*

When you have picked your spot, write and send in a letter to the daycare or new teacher “all about my child” including contact information for anyone who is allowed to pick up your child (and be sure to have the office paperwork filled out in case grandma or someone other than you does need to retrieve your child), who lives in your home, pets and their names, any allergies or sensory aversions, and age-appropriate notes about schedules -- napping and bedtime for babies and toddlers, custody arrangements, and evening lessons or practices for toddlers and older. I also reached out to the guidance counselors at the elementary and middle schools my kids would be attending, just to check in. As the school year got underway, it was clear (and surprising!) that my younger, Thing 2, was really struggling. I had a face and name to talk to my kid about, and the guidance counselor was the go-to person for really hard days. Thing 2 could go to the guidance counselor if she couldn’t manage, and I could call the guidance

counselor for reassurance if we got off to a rocky start in the morning. The guidance counselor also started a little discussion group of my kid and several others that were new to the school, and it was a BIG help!

For younger kids, work out a verbal or written plan with the teacher about when to call you – *Ms. Linda called me when Thing I couldn't pull it together after his daycare nap, waking up to find himself in a new place. When I got there he was sitting with her in a quiet room, wrapped in her arms and clutching my business card.* Leave behind an index or business card with your cell phone number, direct line, extension, or department so they CAN reach you. *Ms. Linda also recommended reading "Owl Babies" by Martin Waddell. We read it a million times, and when I'd pick him up and he would burst into tears of relief, I quoted the mother owl to him, reinforcing the message of the book and reminding him of our snuggly reading time. It gave Ms. Linda a touchpoint, too, that they could talk about when I wasn't there.* Being unable to bounce back from any situation -- nap, disagreement, transitions, fire drills – is a good starting point for working out when you want the teachers to call you for pickup.

For the older kids, make an appointment to speak or Skype with the school principal and introduce yourself and your family. Ask about extracurricular activities that your kids are interested in or that might be new options for them: sports, chess, 4-H, clubs, tech nights... Is there a school garden? Do the kids have lockers, and if so are they allowed to decorate them? Is there a dress code, or informal trend? Will your kids be assigned a “buddy” or is there a welcoming committee? Ask when you will know who their

teachers will be, and if you can contact them to schedule a visit in person or online. Find out if the school supply list is the same grade-wide or if you should check in with specific teachers. Ask for the “welcome” or first-of-the-year packet with school information such as dress codes, cell phone policies, any photo waivers, disciplinary protocols, anti-bullying campaigns, if there is a school-wide book being read, and so on.

For everyone, bring in laminated pictures of family and pets to keep in your child’s backpack, locker, cubby, desk, or daycare crib. In daycare and the earlier grades, we also had some pictures of the school and teacher that we kept at home so that we could look them over on the weekend and stay familiarized.

I would wear a scarf with my outfit every day and if daycare drop-off was rough, I would ask if they wanted to keep my scarf. Sometimes they would leave it in their cubby, or nap with it, or

carry it around all day long! I had a backup scarf in my bag, and dads might want to keep a backup tie or name tag with them as well.



8. Before you leave your old town, have a **goodbye party**, picnic, or play-date. Guide the guests to set the tone as one of excitement, adventure, fun, and future

visits. Hand out slips of paper with your address, a picture or drawing of your house, or an invitation to come visit along with a travel brochure or tickets to a museum or fun destination in your new town. Exchange emails, phone numbers, Skype addresses. Take pictures.

9. Find a pediatrician. First ask your current pediatrician, and your own primary care person, for recommendations in the new area, or which professional organizations they'd suggest consulting based on your family's medical needs. Ask your real estate agent, and school personnel as you meet them. If you or your kids are involved in social groups, or spiritual practices, of course ask there. Your health insurance carrier will also have lists of folks in your network. If you have ongoing health concerns, check with any national groups affiliated with those diseases, conditions, or diagnoses. We found ours in the category of the most-frequently-recommended. It was a big practice, they had experience with asthma, NICU graduates, etc. We stick to one doctor in the practice, but there are others that we see in emergency situations,

so we can stay with our practice. Then ask your pediatrician about specialists, dentists, therapeutic practices, and so on.



10. The First Night. If you're staying in a hotel or not, continue the family

adventure narrative. Either way, unpack those boxes discussed in #6 – with the medicines, nightlights, stuffed animals, blankets, pajamas and so on. Discuss in advance if you'll send the kids to school while you unpack, or if they'll be home helping you unpack, or if a friend or family will watch them. Anxious kids will fare better staying home and watching the unpacking process as it unfolds, if that's possible – then launching into a new school from a relatively stable home environment. But you will know if that's practical for your family – several babies and toddlers at home during the unpacking process may be just adding weeks to the process.

11. **If the sale falls through:** Yes, it can happen. First, make the adult decisions. Think and talk with your mate, parents, roommates or other adults involved, and decide if you'll try again to sell, give up and stay put, or move before you sell (check with your agent for more details on your real estate market and whether that's advisable).

Second, unpack the boxes that you'll need in the meantime if you plan to try again. This is where the importance of labeling became very clear to us. *We had to be packed and out in two weeks and a couple of friends helped us pack in lightning speed, without labeling the boxes. The sale fell through. Two years later, I STILL cannot find my address book and lots of our family photos.*

Learn from my mistake.

12. Finally, pick a day to **celebrate** being done with the move and cook a favorite meal at home or explore your new

neighborhood. Have a party, play-date, or picnic. Make some new memories as a family. You've found and visited the sites that shape your family culture (school, church, library, grocery, etc.)!

Now plan and execute a scavenger hunt of your new area: can you find a spiral staircase somewhere in town? Food trucks? Take a photo of each family member's face reflected in a different surface? A new art museum? A statue? Take some pictures of these finds and celebrations then print and hang them. Follow through on your promises to keep in touch with your old friends and coworkers. Get the kids those items they earned when they signed the kids' listing agreement (see number 4 above if you need a refresher, but I'm sure your kids have not forgotten).

Congratulations!

You did it! Now pop on over to [Funnermother on Facebook](#) and tell us how it went. ☺