

Before Moving, Making An Emotional Connection With Children Is Crucial

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By Paul Bergeron III

The emotional needs of a child can sometimes be inadvertently ignored by a parent. Bergeron explains how a children's book can help open the door to child-parent communication and calm the fears of young, first-time movers.

The countless duties and details that fall on parents during the relocation process no doubt make their heads spin. It is hard for them to stay focused while having to deal with unexpected distractions and a chaotic schedule of house-hunting trips and prep work for the packers. Inevitably, family life becomes unsettling for the employee, spouse, and the children.

By taking the proper steps toward overcoming the turmoil brought on by this heavy dose of change, a special bond can be created between family members, especially between parents and children. The results are cherished memories of an otherwise stressful occasion.

Relocation experts strongly emphasize how important it is for parents to be aware of their children's emotions during a move, especially when dealing with youngsters who are moving for the first time. It is likely that these kids' daily routines have never taken such a jolt.

When children are first told that they soon will be leaving their friends and school, depending on the individual child's balance between adventure and security, their responses can be anything from mild curiosity to an outright refusal to make the move.

"It's easy for people to forget about what a child goes through during relocation," said Phyllis Staines, broker-salesperson, RE/MAX Coastal Real Estate, Ponte Vedra Beach, FL.

"There is always a lot of emphasis placed on the husband and wife finding jobs in the new location, getting used to their new job, and in finding the right school for the children.

"But not many think about the fact that the move is just as traumatic for the kids," especially young children who have no point of reference for such upheaval from which they may draw reassurance.

Some of the most difficult issues for a child who is moving are changing schools, working with new teachers, meeting new classmates, and making new friends.

Experts advise parents to maintain open communication with children throughout the process, reassuring them of the outcome, and calming their fear.

Author Lynne Caloggero, CEO of L. Lemon O'Pea Productions, Pelham, NH, specializes in children's books. She has written, "New Home, New School." Released September 2000, it is based on some of the experiences she had when moving with her children.

The book tells the story of a young worm named Wordsworth, who all his life lived in the dirt of a flowerpot, located in a woman's home.

When the woman decides to replant (relocate) the contents of the flower pot outside near the foot of a tree, Wordsworth becomes worried.

Wordsworth, as the story goes, must then become acclimated to an environment full of change. One of the first things he must do is get on board the school bus and meet new friends.

Throughout the book, written in clever rhyme, Caloggero recognizes and addresses Wordsworth's feelings. She then writes how Wordsworth overcomes that fear, gets on board the school bus, makes friends, and lives happily ever after.

"The book gives parents a chance to open the discussion with their child and find out how the child is feeling about the move," said Caloggero.

"Such discussions help the child to get the anxiety out in the open. The goal of the book is to allow the child's perspective on the move to change from fear and uncertainty to warmth and happiness."

Caloggero pre-marketed the book through real estate agents, parents, teachers, and children in grades kindergarten through four. She said she received positive feedback.

"One parent told me her children wanted to have the book read to them every night before they went to bed.

"They loved the story. If you're a parent, you know what I mean by having children who want the same book(s) read to them each night," said Caloggero.

Chris Stunkard, a counselor at Beech Tree Elementary School in Falls Church, VA, also gave the book a positive evaluation.

"Many times, children lacking confidence do not know if they are capable of making changes," she said.

"In this book, the worm finds that he is able to take the risk and make new friends.

"Students who are moving will identify with the worm and see that he was able to overcome his anxiety."

"'New Home, New School' is a book that admits how scary it is to move and to then make new friends. But in the end, the book shows that the problem is resolved in a positive way.

"This is an extremely imaginative book that I rate as excellent. I would want to have it in my office when dealing with students who are feeling afraid about moving," said Stunkard.

A second-grade student at Beech Tree, after having the book read to him, said, "If I had to move, this book would help me feel better about the idea of making new friends."

Caloggero has also written books for children about how to deal with health care and safety issues, prejudice, respecting the environment, and having a good self-image.