

Psych Savvy

ANCHORAGE SCHOOL DISTRICT PSYCHOLOGY DEPARTMENT

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Thinking of Moving?

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How does moving impact school-age children?

Moving means a change of teachers, friends, and often curriculum. Students must adjust to different teacher and school expectations. Students who change schools are likely to find their new teacher is not using the same textbook as the previous teacher. If the same text is being used, it is highly likely the students are in a different part of the book. You may find your child ends up skipping some chapters and repeating other chapters.

Success in school depends upon many factors, including attending the same school throughout the elementary grades, middle school years, and then high school years. A recent study within the Anchorage School District has quantified what school psychologists, counselors, and teachers have witnessed over the years: schools with students who move frequently have lower levels of academic achievement, and are at risk for social and behavior difficulties.

A research study conducted by the Maryland Department of Education found that 5th grade students who had moved three times since kindergarten scored **32** points lower on a test of reading skills than classmates who had not changed schools. Lower income students, who had moved three times by the fifth grade, scored **52** points lower than comparison students.

High mobility students require teachers to interrupt instruction to spend time orienting new students to the school, classroom, and curriculum. As a result the teacher may not be able to cover the planned number of lessons throughout the course of the year. Multiple school moves during the elementary years, increases the likelihood of retention and reduces the likelihood a student will graduate from high school.

Tips to help your child adjust to a move

- Once the move is certain, include your children in the discussion and planning. Listen to their fears. Letting your child express his or her feelings is essential so he/she will view the move in a positive manner.
- If they are old enough to accompany you house hunting, bring them along. If not, take pictures or videos of their new home and town so they can familiarize themselves with the area.

- Help your child assemble a scrapbook, photo album, or journal of your old house with special memories the family shared.
- Let your children tell their neighborhood friends they are leaving. Help them collect addresses and phone numbers, set up a mailing list and let them have a "moving party" to say goodbye to their friends.
- Assign the children responsibilities on the day you move and the day your belongings arrive. Older children can take care of plants or pets, or can look out for younger siblings. Younger children can make sure rooms are emptied or do other simple tasks.
- Explore the new area with your children soon after you complete the move. Point out schools, stores and other interesting features so the children will begin to feel at home.
- Take your child to visit his or her new school. If possible, try to arrange for your child to meet the teacher ahead of time. After the children begin school, check periodically with their teacher(s) on their progress and adjustment.

Points to consider

- If you must move, try to wait until the end of the school year.
- If you must move during the school year, try to keep your child at the same school until the end of the year.

Tips for schools

- Provide "newcomer" buddies for new students and include a tour of the school.
- Provide a welcome packet that includes teacher expectations, grading procedures and homework policies.
- Use cooperative learning to lower anxiety levels, increase motivation and improve self-esteem.
- Have supplies, materials, and a workspace ready for incoming students.
- Send educational records promptly to the receiving school.
- Maintain a portfolio of work samples that can be sent with the departing student.

References

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