



Moving

We know that any little change, even one as simple as the packaging of your child's favorite toothpaste, can cause your child major anxiety. And now you're going to do what??? Change homes, yards, room colors, smells, lighting, schools, friends, shopping centers, favorite restaurants, and oh so much more??? Moving is an overwhelming process for everyone. So how do you tackle this major life event???

Be less of an overlord

Empower your child by letting him make some of the decisions and including him in the moving process. Giving him a sense of control can help reduce anxiety. Let him pack and unpack some (or all) of his belongings and choose where things go (to the extent possible). Even a simple decision such as choosing dinner on moving day can make a difference.

“Read to me”

Social stories are good preparation tools, as they describe a scenario an individual is going to encounter. If possible, use photographs of the actual home in the story. See the social story links in this article for examples.

Make multiple visits (physical or virtual) to the new home

This may not be feasible if you are moving far away, but if you are close enough, visit the new home as much as you can to make it a familiar place before finally moving day. If physical visits aren't possible, try acquainting your child to his new surroundings by using photos and video. Even if you can visit, you may also want to take pictures of the new home and make a book/photo album from them for your child to reference whenever he might be feeling anxious about the new and unexpected. Thanks to Google Earth and the use of videos by many real estate companies, showing online images of your new home is now easier than ever.

Identify new favorite places

Research the area for the places and activities your child most enjoys. Share pictures, videos and information about these places to help get your child excited about her new location.

Emphasize this is a safe move

There can be tremendous fear of the unknown, so your child most likely feels safer in familiar environments. It may help reduce anxiety for your child if you can keep previous routines, set up his room the same as his last, and take him to see his new school and meet his teachers ahead of his new start date.

If you can, stagger the changes

Changing everything at once can be mind-blowing for anyone. If possible, try staggering the changes. Maybe “practice” being in the new home before the final move date. Do you have to change schools at the same time as the move? Can you set up some play dates or meetings with new neighbors before you move in? Maybe hit up some local restaurants before you move to help ease the transition.

The actual “getting there”

Are you driving to your new home? Flying? Riding a train? Magic carpet? If you are using a new mode of transportation, this is another facet you will need to introduce your child to in the planning stages. If flying, visit our “Airports and Flying” tips at www.pathfindersforautism.org/articles/view/parent-tips-airports-and-flying. If you are traveling by bus or train, try a small “fun trip” on the vehicle ahead of time.

Use those muscles

If your child is sensory seeking, allow him to help lift and move heavy boxes. For some, this physical pressure helps create a calming sensation.

Let Calgon take you away

Moving is hard. And stressful. Really hard and stressful. (I'm not trying to talk you out of it....) Take frequent breaks. Yes, it may add a bit to your moving time, but breaks most likely take up less time than melt-downs.

Put the house on lock-down

If your child is an eeloper, map out the escape routes and put those extra locks and alarms in place before you move in. Or make it the first thing you do when you arrive. For more tips on what to look for, and what to do, refer to “When They Wander or Run Away” at www.pathfindersforautism.org/articles/view/parent-tips-when-they-wander-or-run-away

Find those people living a parallel life to yours

In other words, connect with a local support group. This circle of new friends may be your best resource to finding new doctors, new providers, hair stylists, new watering holes..... I always say, the best advice you will ever get is from other parents.

Batman posters aren't THAT bad in the grand scheme of things

Come on, admit that when you were young, you had Shaun Cassidy and Def Leppard posters hanging in your room. Let your child decorate her room in a way that will allow her to express who she is and feel comfortable in her “own” space. I'm not moving, but as I write this, painters are in my son's room changing his walls to red and white, and soon they will also have flames painted on them. So I'm right there with you parents. If you can, set up your child's room ahead of time so that they can have their own place to go if they need a break from the moving day activities.

WHERE is my Gravity Falls DVD???????

Mark each box clearly and be as specific as you can about the contents. Because you know that the book your child hasn't read in three years is going to be the item your child MUST find and unpack NOW.

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Get those phone and Face Time numbers

Support your child to stay connected with those classmates and friends she is leaving behind. As adults, we don't abandon our friends when we move, so you shouldn't expect your children to. Being able to share their new experiences with old friends can be a form of transitional therapy.

Reliving the past

Allow your child to openly talk about sad feelings from leaving people and things behind. You may need to help your child identify those feelings. Keep in mind that in children, anxiety and depression may be exhibited as anger.

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Additional Resources

Humboldt Moving Company
Video tips for Moving with Autism
www.humboldt.com/autism

Parent Tips: Military Life - Moving and Deployment
www.pathfindersforautism.org/articles/view/parent-tips-military-life--moving-and-deployment

Examples of Social Stories

Moving House from the Stuff with Thing blog
www.stuffwiththing.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/09/Moving-House.pdf

Moving by Lakewood City Schools
www.lakewoodcityschools.org/userfiles/2139/Classes/10476/moving%20social%20story%20one.pdf

My family is moving to a new house
<http://benziesangmassocialstoriesforautism.blogspot.com/2013/07/my-family-is-moving-to-new-house.html>

Social story about moving house using Kid in Story app
www.youtube.com/watch?v=RJ8FHB0KqJA

Social story video
www.youtube.com/watch?v=RJ8FHB0KqJA