

# HELPING CHILDREN ADJUST

## NEW HOME, NEW SCHOOL

by Beverly D. Roman

Each year thousands of relocating parents and children try to make a new home and cope with new schools, new office environments and a new city- possibly even a new country. Moving from school to school can be a scary experience for children. Parents need to know how to smooth each move and how to recognize trouble signs that indicate their children are not adjusting. They also need to know what to do when problems do arise.

### ADVICE TO PARENTS

Depending on children's ages and interests, they can create a scrapbook, write a journal or plan the next city excursion. Give children a disposable camera to take pictures of what they like best in the new city. They can then send photos to friends and relatives to tell them about their new home. Help children to become involved in local activities the family enjoys. Meeting people in smaller groups who share a common interest is a good way to break the ice and make a few friends at any age. Think about the move as a way to learn and expand personal horizons. Relocating families will have more to talk about with new and old friends as their experiences become more varied. And-

- \* Set the example. Don't complain about the move; rather, try to reinforce the positive aspects of the new community.
- \* Reach out and volunteer with a charitable organization and create opportunities for children to do the same. When people care about others, they tend not to dwell on their own concerns.
- \* Go exploring! Learn everything possible about the new community and its people.

### SMOOTHING ADJUSTMENTS

When children enter new environments, they express their feelings in various ways, some of which can signify that they are not adjusting well. Typical trouble signs include: changes in reading ability, attention span, eating habits (weight loss or gain), enthusiasm, energy levels, quarrelsome behavior and unreasonable fears. It is my experience that uncharacteristic behaviors will usually disappear as children settle in, but if not, parents should seek the advice of a pediatrician or a counselor.

Set aside a special family time at least once a week that allows everyone to discuss his/her feelings. During these meetings, be sure to validate both positive and negative feelings, but do encourage everyone to discuss at least one good occurrence.

Anyone who moves will experience to some extent a sense of loss for people, sounds, foods and places. But it is important for the family to bond together and support each other. Many times I have been asked: "Of all the places you lived, which city did you like best?" My answer was always the same, "Wherever my family was." I believe the moves served to make us a more close-knit family because no matter what else happened in a new community, we always had each other

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