

Relocating... Again

Expert advice for helping your children adjust

By Shari Rosen and Karlijn Jacobs-De Hoon



ing. If they are fond of going to the zoo in Shanghai, pictures of a local zoo in your new home can become a valuable focal point that can help to transform Stockholm or Kuala Lumpur into a real place where they can have fun in much the same way as in Shanghai.

A SENSE OF CONTROL

As you frame the move in a context of optimism and family unity, it is also important to foster a sense of involvement. Children who are participating in the process tend to have an easier time believing that a move away from Shanghai is not something being inflicted on them, and are free to occupy themselves with something to look forward to as well as what they will be leaving behind. Many parents find success by asking kids for help in setting up their new rooms before the move. The IKEA racecar bed he will have in Chicago, or the picture she will hang over her dresser in Delhi, can become a concrete symbol of the new, exciting life waiting across the water.

It is also important to avoid interfering with your family's routines. Make the time to visit your favorite restaurant each Tuesday or to get to the Science & Technology Museum on

Parents in the midst of arranging for an international move are under major pressure. New jobs, homes and schools, plane tickets and arrangements for pets, furniture, and even lamps inevitably accumulate into a massive, months-long project. Even organized and caring parents under these circumstances can overlook some of the practical, common sense steps they can take to reassure their children in a trying moment.

Some children, confronted with the stresses of a massive life change that they did not ask for, can react with a mixture of frustration and anxiety, which are easily mistaken for anger. Unchecked, these feelings exacerbate the already considerable challenges of a move, and can sour their remaining time in Shanghai. To help your children through the big move with grace, positivity and courage, follow these simple, yet necessary, suggestions:

AN ON-GOING CONVERSATION

Children often perceive early on that something major is happening, sometimes even before any decision has been

made. A sense of impending change, even after parents initiate a discussion of what is happening with something like "We are moving to Singapore because Mom just got a promotion," leaves kids facing a number of open questions: "Does this mean I can't see my friends anymore? Is year three in Singapore the same as it is in Shanghai? Do we have to leave Lightning behind?"

Addressing these questions head-on is an excellent starting point for a broad and positive conversation in preparation for a successful move. Treat it as a shared experience, a story that you are telling each other as you live through it. Share concerns of your own. Emphasize that you are together, and that part will never change. Offer children opportunities to make their own predictions about what will be hard about life in a new place, and especially about what will be nice about it.

Help children to identify things about their new home that they may find excit-

Document your time here

Whether we are going somewhere new or back to wherever we consider 'home', sharing our experiences and life in Shanghai with family and friends can put us all at a loss for words, especially children. Since a picture is worth a thousand words, prepare your children for these situations by making a mini 'Our Shanghai Life' photo album together before you leave. Let them choose one photo to represent their school life, another of their favorite meal, your home, a recent trip, or their go-to place to play. Flipping through these snapshots will guide their explanation and give both new and old friends a sneak peek into your adventurous life in Shanghai!

Sunday, if that's what you normally do. It strongly reinforces the notion that the important things are not changing, and offers kids a chance to discuss their feelings in a safe, relaxed setting. Finally, try to manage your own stress level around your child. The more you can see to it that irritating phone calls don't coincide with play dates, the better for everybody.

DIFFERENT KIDS, DIFFERENT FEELINGS

How a kid reacts to the prospect of moving to a new city depends on personality, age, the circumstances of the move, their feelings towards Shanghai and many other factors. There are, however, several basic ways of displaying anxiety that we see over and over, and these bear mentioning:

Displays of aggression, similar to anger

This may indicate that a child feels an acute lack of control over the process.

Clingy, infantile behavior

This suggests that a child is attempting to pretend it is not happening. Some encouragement may be necessary in order to confront the issue.

A sudden drop in motivation

This is particularly prevalent among teenagers, who can sometimes find it harder to work towards their long-term futures when the short term is so uncertain.

Children acting 'a little too excited'

Children who do not like this city often develop unrealistic expectations that everything will be perfect in the next one. In these cases, imparting an appropriate sense of continuity may entail adjusting expectations down in order to avoid a nasty shock later.

Assemble a story of continuity, and an intimidating process becomes comprehensible; bring children in on decisions that affect them, and anxieties become manageable. Kids who understand how they

feel, know that they are not alone and believe that they have very much to look forward to are prepared to cope admirably with traveling to a new home, making new friends and whatever else may come.

// Shari and Karlijn both work at The Essential Learning Group (ELG), a family-oriented, multidisciplinary organization that aims to support children in all areas of development. ELG's program, 'Relocation, No Frustration', is for children that are facing the challenges of relocating or repatriating and helps prepare them for the upcoming move through fun exercises. For more information contact services@chinaelg.com.

BUMPS & BABES ASKS THE EXPERTS

We just found out we are moving back to the US and I haven't told my 4-year-old yet, as I am scared about his reaction. Shanghai is his home, where his friends are and I don't know how to prepare him. How should I tell my son we are moving and is there anything I can do to make the transition easier for him?

Find a good time to tell your son that you are moving back to the US. Telling him very early might just give him more time to worry, but on the other hand, he needs enough time to digest the news. Ideally, around six weeks before the actual move is a good time, however, if there's a risk that he might hear the news from somebody else, tell him now. By hearing the news from you he knows that he matters. Break the news at home, when the whole family is together and relaxed. Give him a how, a when and a why to prevent him from thinking that all of this happened randomly. Showing confidence that you have made the right decision and that it is final will be easier for him to deal with as well. Reassure him that your family will always stay together, that he will be able to stay in touch with his friends in Shanghai. Emphasize things that he will be looking forward to in your new home. Let him ask as many questions as he wants to. Be honest and positive about it but also realistic and don't make promises that may not come true or that are a bit exaggerated.

// Answer by Nina Cheung, who holds a masters in social education and is the Educational Director and co-founder of the Sino-European International Preschool (SEIPS)

Kerry Parkside 浦东嘉里城

May - Oct 五月至十月

Rhapsody.PM

MUSIC FEST AT KERRY PARKSIDE

“乐”在嘉里 “乐”享周末

浦东嘉里城夏日音乐节

www.kerryparkside.com

微信 WeChat Kerry Parkside

6.14 Fri 6.15 Sat 6.16 Sun 6.21 Fri 6.22 Sat
17:30~20:00 17:30~20:00 15:00~18:00 17:30~20:00 17:30~20:00

7.12 Fri 7.13 Sat 7.19 Fri 7.20 Sat 7.21 Sun
17:30~20:00 17:30~20:00 17:30~20:00 17:30~20:00 15:00~18:00

KERRY HOTEL that's urbanfamily SHANGHAI URBANATOMY

No.1378 Huamu Road, Pudong
Huamu Road Station - Metro Line 7

七号线 - 花木路站
浦东新区花木路1378号