



### **We're moving.... Again.**

Children who are exposed to multiple moves may have difficulty forming and maintaining friends and relationships. They may appear depressed and withdrawn while others may appear defiant and aggressive thus showing signs of either resignation or anger. Some children experience moving as loss and separation and thus experience a grief reaction, particularly in view of multiple moves. For children who experience multiple moves, there is a deepening disconnect; socially, emotionally and academically.

A fatigue overcomes these children when time after time they must acclimate to change, different peers, teachers, curriculum, environment and even their own parents' adjustment. They never quite feel settled in. They lack a sense of belonging and they learn that in order to protect themselves from the feelings of loss and upset of change, to not even try to settle in, for to do so is to risk more hurt.

It is unknown how many moves may result in serious hardship for children generally. Each situation is assessed individually. There are several factors that affect how many moves it will take to upset the child's social, emotional and academic development. Factors relate to the child, situation and parents.

Some children are quite resilient, able to settle in quickly and make connections with new people. Other may require supports in order to settle in and still others may be quite vulnerable to change, being less secure to begin with. Then there is the factor of age. The older the child, the more difficult it may be for them to work their way into already defined social groups. They may never be accepted into the new hive, so to speak.

Situational factors can also affect the child's ability to adjust to change and multiple moves. If the move is predictable and seen positively by both parents, the child may come to view the move positively too and this can aid in adjustment. If the move is the result of parental separation, domestic violence or parental job loss, then matters are generally seen as outside of parental control and hence the change can be frightening to the child. If the change results in the

child going from a situation of less social supports to more social supports, then the situation may be positively anticipated by the child and experienced as a good thing.

Parents who try to sell the move to a child as in their interest when the child feels otherwise can create greater hardship for the child's adjustment. If the child is not keen on the move, understand that from his or her perspective, this is a painful experience beyond their control. These children can be resentful towards their parents or circumstance and may view the world as an emotionally unsafe or insecure place.

To facilitate adjustment, children will feel safer or more in control if they have some input as to the process and if they are supported with whatever they may be feeling. It may be helpful for some children to maintain their connections with the teachers and friends they are leaving to reduce the sense of loss. This can be achieved with telephone calls, visits and on-line solutions such as emails, messaging programs and video calls.

Is your child affected by moving? Look for changes in behaviour and ask. Parents are cautioned to separate their need to perceive their child as unaffected when in fact they may be very affected. It is important to clearly view the child's reactions and listen to what they say. If there is a disconnect between what they say and how they appear, go by how they appear. They may be telling you what you want to hear. In these situations, behaviour speaks louder than words. It may be necessary to evaluate the necessity and impact of a move. Stability tends to be the key antidote to the effects of multiple moves.

Gary Direnfeld, MSW, RSW  
(905) 628-4847  
gary@yoursocialworker.com  
<http://www.yoursocialworker.com>

Gary Direnfeld is a social worker. Courts in Ontario, Canada, consider him an expert on child development, parent-child relations, marital and family therapy, custody and access recommendations, social work and an expert for the purpose of giving a critique on a Section 112 (social work) report. Call him for your next conference and for expert opinion on family matters. Services include counselling, mediation, assessment, assessment critiques and workshops.