

When You Have to Move House

by Barbara Crane

THE other day, I was talking to a doctor on a new housing estate, and he was telling me about the high turnover of patients on his list. He said that the average family in the district moves house at least once in every four years. And this, he said, wasn't from number 10 to number 45, but, for instance, into the area from Yorkshire, or out of it to Dorset. The husband gets promotion, and this necessitates uprooting the family from its home town or from the previous place of work, and settling down again to make new friends and neighbours.

What interested me was the doctor's observations on how this affected his surgery. Apparently, women do not take to this nomadic life as easily as their husbands. He has to prescribe for about 80 per cent of them during the first six months after moving into the area. The men have a job and colleagues, but the wives and mothers at home often feel very lonely until they have made friends, and their bodies send out distress signals.

The children vary in their reaction to the upheaval of a move. Tiny children will not have made friends or started school, but, on the other hand, they are the ones most affected by the mother's mood. If she is lonely and depressed, they can sense it, and if the change of address has separated them from beloved grandparents, they are bound to be missed.

Older children have to get used to a new school where things are done differently, but they soon make new friends. Try to establish a real contact with the school, and get to know the staff, so that your interest and understanding bridges the gap. One eight-year-old had just learned to do cursive handwriting (what she called real 'joined-up' writing) at her old school, and was very proud of this new skill. Then she moved house and the school she now attended insisted that she must go back to printing everything. Her mother could not understand why she so disliked her new class, until she discovered the cause and sorted out the problem with the form-teacher.

Most mothers and children find there are some difficulties to be overcome before they can feel the new surroundings are really 'home' for them, but a proportion may actually thrive on frequent moves. One mother said how the advantages always struck her most forcibly at Christmas when the dozens of cards and letters made her realise how many new friends they had made.

This is the answer to the loneliness, of course, and if you have children they are always the means by which you can get to know others like yourself. You meet other Mums 'in the same boat' at the Clinic, in the park, and at school functions. Try to join a group where you are most likely to be with others with similar interests.

One of the things which can happen when families move house, is that they can become almost too self-contained for a while. Husband and

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wife are so busy getting the house and garden into good shape and reorganising everything to suit the needs of the family, that it leaves no time to be sociable. They know hardly anyone, and there seems barely time to get beyond the garden gate. If they do go out, it is usually in the family car for an outing. So if the children have come from a situation where there were a number of relatives and friends around, they are going to miss them. It puts too much strain

upon a small family unit to be alone together all the time.

For the children's sake, try to make time soon after the move to get to know a few neighbours well enough for the children to play together and so widen their horizon. And keep in touch with old friends and with relatives by phone and letter, so that the children do not feel cut off from old ties. Adults have enough experience to know that they will see everyone again and will not lose touch, but children are apt to feel that the parting is for ever. In a young child, there may even be a sense of loss amounting to a feeling of rejection, and so it is very important to encourage some kind of correspondence between relatives and friends left behind and the children.

Before they can write words they can draw pictures—of a sort! (You may need to add a word of explanation in your letter.) One Granny, left behind 100 miles away knew her little [sic] granddaughter would particularly miss her cat, Blackie, so, within a week of the move, she sent a couple of snaps of the cat to the little girl. On the back of them were several 'kisses' and a paw-mark in ink from Blackie. The child immediately insisted on sending him her photo and a tin of cat-food, together with a 'letter' for Granny! It was well worth the packing difficulties to see how happy it made her that she could still maintain a relationship which had meant a great deal.

Moving house to a new area when you have a family is not quite the simple matter it first appears. There is more to it than packing tea-chests and choosing new curtains. Relationships are built up over a matter of months and years, and are very much part of life. It takes an effort to make new friends when you are parted from your old ones and determined not to lose touch with them. Fortunately, children are very resilient. Given the opportunities, they can show their parents how to adjust to the new life.