



GOODBYE, HOUSE: A PARENT'S GUIDE

It's never easy being the new kid on the block. *Goodbye, House* invites your child to express and order his feelings as he chronicles the family move with worksheets provided in the SeaCountry KIDS section of our website. The worksheets engage the child in activities from the moment he is first told about the impending move. As he fills in the worksheets, the child will gain a sense of mastery over the new environment and the feeling of overwhelming newness will diminish. Once the adjustment is completed, *Goodbye, House* will serve as a scrapbook that can be reviewed fondly.


The most important function of *Goodbye, House* is as a diary in which the child can feel free to express herself as the move approaches. By writing down what she feels when she first hears about the move, and again around moving day, and later when she arrives in the new place, she will be able to acknowledge and clarify the range of emotions she passes through. She will also be better able to talk about her feelings with you.


We suggest you take the time now to read *Goodbye, House* before your child begins to fill it in so you'll know what questions your child will be likely to ask in the weeks ahead. The following pages offer general suggestions to help you make the move easier for your child, and specific suggestions to help your child use *Goodbye, House*.


 **Tell your child as soon as possible about the move.** You might think it would be best to hold off until the last moment, but children can usually sense when something's going on. So think of the early announcement as giving your child time to adjust rather than time to worry. What you don't want is for your child to hear about the move from neighbors or friends before hearing it from you.


 **Be honest about the reason for the move.** When the move is a matter of choice - for instance, to take a new job or because of a promotion - many parents like to bring their children into the discussion to ask how they feel about it.

If the move is necessitated by a divorce, the loss of a job, or death in the family, the children should understand what's going on. Keeping them in the dark or smoothing over the details will only increase their anxiety. The more frank you are, the more your children will be encouraged to be honest with you about their feelings.


 **Don't hide your doubts about the move.** By all means point out the advantages of where you'll be moving, but don't forget to give your children the idea that it's normal to be sad about leaving their old life behind. Let them know that you, too, have some regrets about moving. On the other hand, don't assume that all your fears are shared by your children. Some kids may adjust to moving more easily than their parents imagine.


 **Inform your children's teachers about the move as soon as you tell the children.** If your child's classroom behavior changes, the teacher will take into account that the move is on her mind.

 **Spend extra time with your child.** Just when there are heavy practical demands on your time, your child will need you more than ever.

 **Allow your child to fantasize.** For many children, the idea of moving evokes powerful fantasies of a fresh start: They'll leave behind a nickname they hate, they'll

always keep their room neat after the move, and so on. Even if they are unable to realize those fantasies, don't tease them about it.


 **Read children's books about moving.** One way to help your child to work out fears about moving is to give her storybooks about kids who have moved. Ask your librarian for suggestions.

 **Help ease your child's fears about leaving old friends.** Children worry that when they move, their old friends will forget them. Many of the projects in *Goodbye, House* are designed to give children the sense that the move doesn't mean that their past life is irretrievably lost. Here are some ways you can help:

1. Suggest to your child that she keep in touch with old friends. *Goodbye, House* includes an address, phone numbers, and e-mail listing for old friends, which the child can fill out. If you're moving a short distance, let her know that old friends can come and visit and that she can return to her old neighborhood. For long distance moves, you may want to promise that she can call her best friends on their birthdays or other special occasions. If you have a family computer, e-mail is another way for your child to stay connected to her social circle.

For both short and long distance moves, we've suggested that your child give friends pre-stamped postcards (available at the post office) with her name and address. That way, she can be sure to get some mail during her first weeks at her new home.

2. Encourage your child to say goodbye to special people. Children who are normally outgoing may have an attack of shyness when they are moving. They may need encouragement, but they will feel better if they make the effort to say goodbye to people like their school bus driver and soccer coach. You may also want to let your child pick out a small gift for people who have been especially nice, such as a favorite baby sitter or neighbor.
3. Plan a going - away party. Some teachers are amenable to having a party in the classroom at the end of the school day if the parents supply the snacks and drinks. Or you may choose to have a party at home. Some families like to have a farewell open house for both kids and adults before the move. Take pictures of your child and her friends at the party. Later she may want to paste them into *Goodbye, House*.
4. Lend or give your child an inexpensive camera. For some projects in *Goodbye, House*, we've asked your child to paste in a photograph. A picture of where you live now, for instance, should be a comforting reminder during the first few weeks at the new home. You may already have photographs on hand to paste into *Goodbye House*.

 **Prepare your child for whether his pets will move or not.** If the pet will be making the move with you, decide with your child how the pet will be cared for during the move. On moving day, your child may want to be responsible for keeping the dog or cat out of the movers' way. Enough people have told of a pet panicking and running off on moving day that it seems clear that pets sense the impending move and need the special attention your child may provide.

If you're moving to a place where pets are not allowed or if they can't come with you for some other reason, explain the situation to your child and discuss what would be best to do.

Are there friends or relatives who might like the pet? Once a new owner is found, allow the child to be present when the transfer is made. If possible, let him see where the pet will be staying. Your child may want to write instructions for the new owner explaining how to take care of the pet. He can also give the new owner a postcard to write news of the pet's well being.

✚ **Make lists with your child** of ways she can help out before the trip, on the day of the move, and once you arrive at the new home.

✚ **Allow your child to participate in cleaning out and packing.** And remember the two cardinal rules for cleaning out: (1) Don't throw away any of your child's possessions without asking. He may decide to give them away or to sell them in a yard sale, but let the decision be his. The space you save in the packing just isn't worth the upset. (2) Don't leave anything behind - including a swing set that's impossible to move, or a piano that you can't fit through the door - without first explaining to your child before the move. He may want to take pictures of the things he loves that won't be coming with you and paste them in *Goodbye, House*.

Encourage your child to pack his own toys and belongings. Be sure to label the carton so it can be found easily when you arrive.

✚ **Make plans with your child for moving day.** To have the kids around or not to have them around on moving day...that is the question. The move might be a lot easier if they were at a friend's or relative's house. But some children might feel neglected. So talk with each child to see how he or she feels and if and how you can accommodate these feelings.

If your children will be there on moving day, sit down beforehand and make a list of simple chores they'll be responsible for. The children will feel that they're needed and you'll feel relieved that they won't be getting in the way.

✚ **Consider the children's interests when packing the moving van.** It may be worth considering whether you'd like the movers to put your children's furniture and belongings in the van last so they can be the first to be taken out on arrival. Getting the kids' rooms set up first not only reassures them that they have a "home" in the new house or apartment but - on the practical side - gives them a place to stay out of the way. They can be involved in arranging their rooms while you oversee the rest of the unloading and unpacking.


✚ **Celebrate your arrival.** Children have a real sense of ceremony. Perhaps you can arrange to have a special toast when you first arrive at your new home - champagne for the adults and milk and cookies for the kids.

✚ **Let your child help decorate her room.** If you can arrange to give your child a fair amount of autonomy in this process, it will help her gain a sense of mastery over her new environment. For instance, if the rooms are to be painted, allowing your child to help choose the color of her room might make her happy. You might want to promise her a new thing for her room, such as a new bedspread or a big bulletin board.

✚ **Help your child make new friends.** The biggest fear about moving is that the new kids won't like them. Each child has his own pace when making new friends and becoming familiar with the neighborhood. Some kids are eager to start. Others need more time. Whatever the pace of your child, respect it and don't push too hard. You can help best by being available to facilitate the process. On that score, here are some suggestions from children:

1. Many children say it's awkward to walk over by themselves and knock on a neighbor's door to see if there are any kids to play with - and it may not be wise to let your child go alone since you won't know much, if anything about your new neighbors. It's a

- good idea to go with her and introduce yourself to your new neighbors while she meets the children in the house. Encourage her to invite new friends over; even if the condition of the house is less than perfect.
2. Very often the excitement of the moving van will bring neighborhood kids over to see what's going on. If possible, have lemonade and cookies on hand.
 3. Children report that one of the best ways to get to know a new neighborhood is to bicycle or take a walk with a neighborhood child. The new neighborhood friend can point out where other children live and play. Some children say it's helpful if a neighborhood friend draws a map for them.
 4. As was true before the move, children need your special attention after the move, too. More story time before bed, walks and drives together to explore the area - all will help reassure your child that, no matter what, he's still got you.
 5. The more social networks you set up, the better for your child. If you join a church or synagogue, the children can start going and making friends there. Joining the local Y can bring the entire family into contact with new people. Joining the parents' organization at your children's school will help them feel you're part of their community. By meeting parents of children the same age as yours, you will begin to develop a network of people to ask about clubs, scouting programs, Little League, and other activities that you think your children might be interested in.

 **Help your child prepare for the first day of school.** Whether your child arrives during the school year or begins school with the rest of the children, the first day of school can be frightening. There are things you can do in advance to help make the first day of school as problem - free as possible.

1. Try to arrange to go with your child to meet his teacher before the first day of school. Then he can see the classroom and get a sense of the layout of the school, and the teacher can show him some of the books he will be using and what he will be studying. Also, by finding out something about your child in advance, the teacher will be better able to introduce him to the class. The more the teacher can tell the class about your child, the more questions the other kids can ask him about himself.
2. Depending on your child's age and needs, you may want to accompany her on the trip to school for the first few days. Or an older brother or sister or a child in the neighborhood could take her.
3. Check your child's progress in school during the first few months. If there are any problems, talk with the teacher. You might decide to arrange for special help so he can catch up in subjects in which he may be behind.

Eventually your child will make friends and settle into her new home and school. By then, "where we used to live" will be a warm memory to be recalled with pleasure. Once the adjustment is made and *Goodbye, House* is completed, make sure that the book is kept safely so that it can be treasures along with other childhood mementos long after your child is making her own moves in the world.