

# Helping a Child Cope with a Friend Moving Away

By Stef Daniel



One of the sad realities of life that every person learns as they grow older, is that nothing really ever stays the same. There is an undercurrent in life that is constantly changing things whether we want things to change or not. And when this ebb and flow afflicts a child in the form of their friend moving away, it can turn into an emotionally challenging time for a child of any age. This is especially true because for many young kids, a friend moving away suddenly is the first realization of just how temporary things in life can be and just how little control we truly have over some of the things that mean the most to us.

Much of how you deal with helping a child cope when a friend moves away depends on the child's age. For instance, if your child is young and is losing a best friend to a relocation, most experts recommend waiting until the time is near to discuss the move. Children under the age of seven, do not have a very good grasp on the concept of time and there is really no need in upsetting them months or weeks in advance. Plus, they will imagine the loss and feel the sadness longer than necessary. For older children, the news of a best friend or playmate moving away may come from the child that is moving himself rather than from the parents which can cause an unexpected upset on behalf of your child.

The following tips will help you help your child when a close friend moves away.

Remember that the loss your child will feel IS real, and you should be as compassionate as possible for as long as they need to grieve. Child experts say that children who are dealing with the loss of a friend in the form of moving can and will experience the same types of grief and anxiety that an older person may feel in the event of a death.

1. Stay positive! Regardless of your child's age, make sure that you make it clear that you will help them stay in touch with their friend. For younger children, it may be wise to show them on a map the distance of the move so that they can grasp the situation. Additionally remind your child that they will be able to talk, text, skype, email and connect online as often as possible. One of the great things about society today is that kids have umpteen ways to stay connected with people who are not physically present.
2. Help your child stay interested in their other friends. When one friend moves, a child may be ultra focused on that one friend as they try to spend as much time with them as possible. This can make moving day even more difficult. Encourage your child to enlarge their social circle, and invite other kids over as well as the child that is moving in the interim period so they will realize that they will still have friends.
3. Remind your child that the move will likely be more difficult for their friend, than for them. Try to give your child the role of being sympathetic toward their friend. Point out that it is the friend who will have to readjust to new surroundings, start a new school, make new friends etc.
4. Talk with the friends' parents about planning a visit if possible a few weeks after the move. This of course depends on the distance of separation and the age of the child. However, when kids realize that they will still get to see one another, and visit a new place in the process, it gives them something else to focus on rather than their own feelings of grief and loss. Sit down with the moving child's parents to work out concrete arrangements if possible BEFORE the child moves away.
5. Help your child create a friendship keepsake. This is something that the kids can do together, making a book or photo album for themselves and for their friend that is moving. This can become a treasured keepsake during times when your child is upset, and can be a wonderful reminder for the friend that has moved.
6. Despite the numerous ways that people stay in touch, recommend that your child and his or her friend exchange a weekly diary. They can each have the diary for a week and write down everything that they have been doing, then email or mail it to their friend so he or she can do the same. This gives them something positive to keep busy during the week and helps them feel connected to their friend that has moved.
7. Help your child feel connected after the move. While your child may suffer through times of extreme sadness, grief and loss you should do everything possible to keep them as socially active as possible. This can be a great time to sign them up for a sport or special interest program. Busy is the key. The more time they spend doing things with other children, the less time they will have to feel sorry for one another.

8. Allow your child to feel the many different emotions, from anger to despair and from grief to sorrow, that are normal. Although there is nothing that you can do to change the circumstances, you CAN be there to support your child. Whatever you do, avoid minimizing the situation, which will make your child think that you don't care.
9. Make sure your child understands why their friend is moving. For many military families, moving is a natural and normal part of life. When your child realizes that the family is moving away because they have to, or because of a job they might be better equipped to handle the move as maturely as possible. This can help to diffuse some of the anger and resentment that they may feel about the move.
10. Certainly, you have experienced a close friend or family member moving away in your own life. Draw some of your compassion from that experience, and share with them the ways that you have remained close and connected despite a geographical distance. This also shows your children that you really DO understand how they feel.

Source: <https://www.professorshouse.com/helping-a-child-cope-with-a-friend-moving-away/>