



The Ultimate Guide to Moving Abroad with Children

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The decision to move overseas is a big one, no matter your situation. If you're moving as a singleton or carefree couple, there's plenty to consider. However, when the situation is such that you'll be moving overseas as a family with children, matters can get more complex.

If you're moving overseas with kids, you're sure to have a list of questions as long as your arm. Even moving house locally with kids can be a challenge - preparing them emotionally, choosing schools, moving medical records and choosing a new paediatrician are all challenging enough. But when you throw in the international factor, there's even more to consider.

- Should my child attend a local or international school?
- What additional paperwork and visas are required for minors?
- What medical and vaccination records will be needed for the move?
- How can I prepare my child emotionally for an international move?
- Will my child have to learn a new language? If so, how do I go about supporting this?

In addition to supporting your international move from a logistics perspective, we're also here to help your family prepare. We've pulled together some of the most important information you'll need to consider when getting ready to move overseas with your kids.





Preparing Your Child Emotionally for a Move Abroad

For most children, moving house - whether it's across town or across the world - is daunting. It raises many questions about their comfort and security and can raise feelings of fear, anxiety, and even loss. However, most kids will also find a bit of excitement coming into the mix. The key for any parent preparing their children for a move abroad is to try and capitalise on that seed of excitement while alleviating their fears.

By choosing to focus on the more exciting elements of the move, you can help your child to focus on the positives of moving overseas and by feeding these feelings consistently, you may find that your child's positive feelings begin to overtake their negative ones. Here are our tips for helping your child prepare emotionally for their big overseas adventure.

Paint a positive picture - Nobody knows your child like you do. Be sure to share plenty of information about your new destination country that you know will excite your little one. If you're moving to Texas and your child loves horses, tell them what a big part of the state's culture horses are and how they can expect to see them regularly. Perhaps you're moving to Switzerland and your child loves winter sports like snowboarding - let them know they can expect to experience their favourite activity more than they have been able to so far. Or maybe your child loves animals and you're moving to Africa, where some of the world's most majestic beasts roam. Take some time to think about this and how to get your child excited.

It's also important for your child to have positive expectations of what their life will look like there. Be sure to talk to your child about what their daily routine will look like, from school to afternoon activities, to decorating their bedroom and enjoying family dinners. Let your child know that although their life will change in many ways when you all move to another country, the important foundations will remain.

Involve children in making decisions about the move - We all remember being small, and one of the most frustrating things about life as a child was the lack of control. Decisions tend to sit with the grown ups, but when a kid's life is turned upside down by an international move, it's important to give them some semblance of control. Here are just a few ways to empower your child throughout the international relocation process.

- Let them pick their outfit for any passport or visa photos
- Have them choose a few key comfort items to include in their carry on luggage
- Include them in the process of looking for a home in your new country, even if it's just looking at online listings
- Show them pictures of their new room and ask them how they want to decorate it
- Have them choose activities for the first few days in your new country
- Get them involved with packing their belongings and deciding which to bin, donate and take

Talk to them and ask questions - Your child might struggle to verbalise their fears about moving, depending on their age and emotional maturity. Asking them properly framed questions might help them to better express how they feel about the situation. It's also important to let them know they can voice any concerns about the upcoming move and to not feel like they have to hide anything. Ask open questions like what they think about the move, if they have any questions for you or if there's anything they want to know.

Try not to ask questions that can plant more doubt though, like if they are afraid or unsure about anything. The issue here is that if your child isn't concerned, asking questions like this could make them find things to worry about!



Make the Move an Adventure

Kids love a game or challenge. So in addition to painting a positive picture about the move, you can make the preparation out to be a game or challenge. Follow these tips to get your children fired up about moving overseas.

Make packing a game - While you're unlikely to be managing all of the packing for your overseas move yourself, especially if you're working with a company like Gerson Relocation, there are still going to be some aspects you'll want to handle for yourself. There may be the packing of certain heirloom items you want to oversee yourself, and you'll for sure want to pack the items you need at hand during your journey to your destination country.

Getting your children involved in the packing process can be a fun part of preparing to move. Prior to the real packing starting, you can give your children challenges for decluttering. Set up baskets or boxes labelled "take," "bin," "storage," and "donate."

Incentivise your children to donate toys they don't want to take with them on the move, to really think about what they want to take with them, what can be thrown out and what should go into storage until you return to your home country. You can set up a competition for siblings to compete with one another or make it so that your child is competing against themselves or need to meet specific criteria to get a prize.

Make use of Google Earth - It's likely that while you have visited your destination country on previous work trips, your children won't have been there prior to the move. Making the relocation an exciting and interactive experience for your child cannot only help create a positive sense of adventure but also give them some context in terms of what they can expect when they arrive at their new home.

Google Earth is a fantastic tool for exploring new areas. Show them your home abroad on Google Earth and let them "wander" the surrounding streets. Do the same with their school, local attractions you'll visit once you get there, restaurants, shops and more. This will help them to feel excited about the prospect of seeing their new town or city for the first time in person and they will already feel somewhat familiar with the place.

Plan for your arrival - Getting your children to focus on settling in their new home in a positive way will only help them to feel more confident about the overall experience. Get them involved in planning some activities for the first few days after your arrival beyond unpacking and getting settled. This could include:

- Choosing decorations for their new room
- Choosing some local attractions to visit, like zoos, amusement parks, aquariums or beaches
- Deciding what to do for their new neighbours, like baking cookies, colouring pictures or making some crafts.





Visa and Passport Information for Children

When relocating with children, the immigration process is something that many people rarely give much consideration to with the main focus being the immigration status of the adults in the family. Whilst children often present few challenges from an immigration perspective, if they are clearly defined as dependent upon the parent, there are still some considerations that need to be taken into account. We recommend making sure the requirements for your children are considered at the same time as the adult members of the family with your immigration advisor. The first step is to check how the destination location defines a 'child'. In most countries children are classed as dependents up to the age of 18, the immigration rules define anyone who is over the age 18 or is no longer financially dependent on their parents, are married or have their own children not deemed as dependents (children).

Once you are comfortable that the children in your family fall within this definition then the most important thing to consider when relocating with your child is whether there are any custody requirements to address, for example if you are separated, divorced, or share custody with another parent. If this is the case, you will need to obtain special permission, or consent, to take the child to live abroad.

If your family includes children who have been adopted then in most locations the Immigration requirement is focussed on being able to prove that you have sole responsibility (not just legal custody) for the child. Where children are involved it is important to consider the legal custody situation from the outset and you should work closely with your immigration advisor to ensure this is planned into the timeline for the immigration process.

We also recommend considering the following best practice steps to take when moving children overseas, ensuring that you have access to the child's passport and have checked that it has at least 2 clear free pages left within it along with at least 6 months validity is an important part of any immigration process. Reviewing your children's passports (along with your own) with your immigration advisor is essential to ensure you have the correct guidance on the immigration requirements of the host location.





Local or International Schools?

In most cases, when you move overseas to a larger town or major city, you'll have several schooling options when it comes to your children. While each country is different in terms of their school system and curriculum, you'll typically find that you have at least 2 options - sending your child to an international school, or a local school.

Choosing the right schooling situation for your child will go a long way in helping them to feel settled in their new home. Every child is different, though, and you'll need to make this decision based on your knowledge of your child's personality, likes and dislikes, academic ability and some helpful information. Continue reading for some additional facts about international schools and local. Bear in mind that there are always other options, though they may not be suitable for your family. This might look like homeschooling - or the total opposite - a boarding school.

International schools - An international school is a great option for many children, especially those who are older and might struggle with learning a foreign language. The quality of international schools varies wildly, so it's important to conduct as much research as you can before arriving in your new country. While they do offer some cultural consistency, international schools can also require travel and can present expensive fees.

Local schools - The main thing to consider about enrolling your children in local schools is that they will possibly need to learn a new language. If you're moving to a country that shares the same language as your home country, this won't be an issue. However if you're moving to a non-English speaking country or vice versa, this will need to be a consideration. Young children often pick up new languages quickly and without a struggle, so local schools can be a great option for smaller children.

A local school, and learning the local language, might be ideal if your relocation is permanent or long term. If you're only going to be on assignment in the new country for a brief period of time (months up to a year), it might be worth sticking with an international school where your child can speak the language that is their mother tongue.





Learning a New Language

As mentioned above, younger children are often quite good at picking up foreign languages. You might find that by enrolling them in a local school and working with a tutor for a brief period of time will help them learn the language rapidly.

For some children, especially older children, picking up a new language can be a little more challenging. Private tutors are always an option, or for extra help, you can research local language schools in your new city that have programs for children.

Again, you might find that if you're only staying in a new country for a brief period of time, it may not be worth your child learning the language in which case this won't be an issue.

However, regardless of your circumstances, it's always helpful to learn a few key phrases when moving to a new country that speaks a foreign language, and this is just as important for your children. Before the move, work together as a family to learn some important and common phrases you're all likely to need to know once you get there.

These include but are not limited to:

- “Do you speak *insert your language*?”
- Common greetings such as “hello,” “goodbye,” “good morning,” “good afternoon,” “good night.”
- Pleasantries such as “thank you,” “you’re welcome,” “please,” “I’m sorry,” “excuse me.”
- Phrases you might use if you need help, such as, “where is the hospital?” “where is the police station?” “can you help me?” “I am lost.”

If you want to enroll your child in a language class once you arrive in your new country, you should research the reputable language schools in your area. However if you’re keen to learn a few key phrases before your arrival, you should look into apps such as:



Babbel



Rosetta Stone



Duolingo

At Gerson Relocation we aim to make things as simple and transparent for you as possible. If you have any questions at any point, please simply contact us and we’ll provide further assistance, we’re always here to help!

Contact us