

On the *move*

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Moving house is by far one of life's most stressful experiences.

Dr Nicola Davies explores the psychology of moving and how you can make it easier on yourself.
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“AND the danger is that in this move toward new horizons and far directions, that I may lose what I have now, and not find anything except loneliness,” wrote Sylvia Plath, American poet and novelist. Plath’s view may seem bleak, but in a study by the online resource for moving, ‘My Move,’ people rated moving as the most stressful life event next to loss-related events such as death in the family, divorce, or losing a job. In another study, on public housing placement, some residents even described moving three times as being “like having your house on fire once.”

Moving disrupts a person’s typical routine, as well as creates the headache brought about by the legalities of selling or purchasing a house. This is before considering the clutter you have to live in when preparing to move. When moving involves elderly family members, children, or pets, or when the move is happening during a difficult personal time, it can be even more challenging. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, 43 percent of residents had moved from 2006 to 2011. Forty-six million Australians moved within the same immediate locality, 1.8 million people moved into a different locality within Australia, and 1.2 million people moved in from overseas.

You can view moving as exciting or overwhelming, a positive or a negative change, a time of upheaval or of new beginnings.

Psychologist Meredith Fuller shares her expertise on moving house: “Younger people move most frequently; share house singles move most often – approximately every 1.5 years. An emerging new behaviour is related to divorce and separation where, after separation, individuals can’t afford to buy another home, so instead rent units or apartments. Many retirees who elect to downsize end up returning to suburbs and renting small units or houses as they find they can’t stand the noise and loss of privacy or aged care facilities. Tree changers and sea changers (those who abandon city living for a life perceived to be simpler and easier in rural and coastal areas, respectively) are finding that their vision of bliss

Ease the stress

- Start to organise your belongings early – ideally 6-8 weeks before the move. Collect packing supplies and book travel arrangements in advance. Changing your address with the post office before moving will help avoid important mail becoming lost.
 - Enlist help with packing and unpacking. Whether you have friends to help or if you need to pay someone, this is money well spent. Cull as much as possible before you move – it is a waste of space, time and money to take everything and assume you will have energy to sort it out later.
 - Work on sorting one room at a time rather than having chaos everywhere – this applies both to moving out and moving in.
 - While it is nice to get new items for your new home, keep some old favourites to foster a sense of familiarity in your new surroundings.
 - Get adequate sleep. Moving is exhausting, and if you are also flat
- out at work, you really need your rest. Don’t feel obliged to invite friends over too soon – except maybe those who helped you move, and in that case, buy take-away or fire up the barbecue.
- Find out what is expected in the street from neighbours regarding accepted behaviour so that you don’t alienate others by making assumptions about little things – e.g. where the bins are put out and how quickly brought in, mowing nature strips, leaf blowing, etc.
 - Explore your new area. Find coffee shops and become a regular customer. The locals will soon come to know you by sight, then name, and this will help you to make friends and foster a sense of belonging in the community.
 - It takes over three months to feel settled in a new place, so don’t be too quick to decide you don’t like it. Wait it out, and resist the temptation to keep returning to your old stomping grounds.

is disappointing as the ‘cheaper’ lifestyle may not be as cheap as they imagined. If they become ill, they are frustrated with the lack of medical facilities, and if their new, local communities take a long time to embrace them, they can feel lonely. So, before embarking on the tree or sea change, make sure you visit the location over a longer period of time as a weekender and develop friendships first, and select a place that is a satellite to be able to access important facilities.”

Overall, the way we react to stressful life events such as moving is highly dependent on how we view the event and if we have access to personal resources and support from others to help us cope. Making a few arrangements before you move can prevent the anxiety and stress related to this life-changing event. It can be quite disturbing to relocate, especially when you are moving to a place you consider not as good as your current home. Keeping a positive frame of mind and embracing the changes rather than trying to ignore them can help you to settle down more quickly so that you can enjoy the adventures ahead. ✨