

Your Personal Coach

Kathleen Brehony, Ph.D.

Dear Kathleen,

Recently, I was offered the job of my dreams. It is exactly what I've been working to achieve for many years. The only downside is that it is in New York City and to take it will mean uprooting my seven-year-old daughter Nicole. We've lived in the same house in the same small town since she was born. I'm a single father with full custody but my daughter does see her mother every month or so (she lives in a neighboring town and doesn't have a problem with our moving out of the area). My work is important to me but not as important as my daughter. I don't want to make a selfish decision. What do you think I should do?

-- Rich

Dear Rich,

Uprooting your family can be the best of times and the worst of times. Change brings new opportunities, new friends, and new experiences. But change also means letting go, and leaving what's familiar and comfortable.

Your circumstances are complicated by the fact that you are a single dad, and moving will mean that Nicole will have less regular contact with her mother. However, if mom lives in a neighboring town and only sees her daughter "every month or so" it doesn't sound as if this is a particularly close relationship. Of course, discuss your plans with your ex-wife and make every effort to allow her to see Nicole as often as she can. Make sure Nicole knows that you will work with her mother so that they can continue to have good contact and some regular visits. Even though Nicole's mother says it is not a problem for you and Nicole to move, talk with your attorney to make sure all the bases are covered legally.

Living in New York City, for many people, is not a downside at all. This is a vibrant metropolis with a rich culture and more to do than anyone could ever possibly have time for. Certainly it will be an adjustment for both of you, but look at the positive side of it.

I suggest that you sit down with Nicole and tell her about the job offer. Let her know that you want to know her feelings about this potential move. She might surprise you. I also suggest that the two of you hightail it up to NYC and spend a weekend or longer there. Let her get a feel for what it might be like to live there. Let her participate in the decision about where you will live and – when you've zeroed in on a neighborhood – take her to see the school she will attend and the playgrounds or other activities available in that area.

Ask Nicole to tell you about her favorite things in her life right now. Try to make these things happen at your new home. For example, she might say that she really loves playing in the park near your home. When you are on your visit to the city, take her to Central Park or another neighborhood park so that she can see that this favorite thing – as well as many others – will still be a part of her life.

Most children have lots of questions. Answer them directly and positively. Let her know how you feel. Certainly you have friends you will miss, and that can make you sad, even though you are excited about all the new opportunities before you. Be specific

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about how you will keep your connection with those friends, and help her understand that while she may not be able to see her old friends as often as she does now, she, too, can stay connected through email, letters, telephone calls, and visits.

When you settle on an apartment, let Nicole decorate her room. Let her select some new things like a bedspread or poster for the wall. And let her honor some of the old things: A bulletin board or scrapbook of friends and familiar places will help her know that these people and things that are important to her can still be part of her life.

Make sure that you give her lots of your time when you move to New York City. Starting a new job, especially the job of your dreams, means that you will be inclined to go full tilt boogie into your new endeavor. That's important of course, but make sure that you're spending lots of time with Nicole to help her get adjusted to her new life.

Every year millions of families move, whether to a new city (as you are contemplating) or across town, and each of them must make adjustments. But remember that the core of a family is not where you live, but how you live. Emily Dickinson said it best when she wrote, "Where thou art, that is home."

Send your personal coaching questions to kathleen@fullpotentialliving.com or call 473-4004. Kathleen is a personal and executive coach, clinical psychologist, and writer. (©2004 Kathleen Brehony. All Rights Reserved.) Columns are archived at www.fullpotentialliving.com.