What the Research Tells Us about Relocation: Professional Fact Sheet 2026
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1. Does Relocation Harm Children After Divorce?

What we know: Some studies associate post-divorce relocation with less favourable psychological, relational, and behavioural outcomes. Braver and colleagues found negative associations, while more recent studies have produced more nuanced findings. The 2024 scoping review identified only 17 empirical studies from 10 independent samples.
What we don't know: Whether relocation itself causes these difficulties, which children are most vulnerable, whether negative effects persist, and whether moving produces worse outcomes than realistic alternatives.

2. What Happens to Parent–Child Relationships After Relocation?

What we know: Geographical separation can affect opportunities for routine parental involvement and meaningful contact. Studies have identified associations between post-divorce relocation and poorer reported parent–child relationship quality.
What we don't know: How much distance is necessary before relationships are significantly affected, which forms of contact best preserve attachment, and whether long-distance arrangements can maintain comparable relationship quality for different children.

3. Does Relocation Have Long-Term Consequences?

What we know: Retrospective studies of adults who experienced parental relocation during childhood have identified associations with later relationship quality, adjustment, and well-being. However, findings differ across studies and outcomes.
What we don't know: Whether these associations are causal, which difficulties persist into adulthood, whether some consequences diminish over time, and which childhood conditions predict long-term outcomes.

4. Does Relocation Reduce Parental Conflict?

What we know: Conflict and family violence can influence both relocation decisions and child adjustment. Fabricius and Braver (2006) found relocation-related associations with negative outcomes even after statistical adjustment for reported conflict and violence. Their analysis offered little evidence that moving reduced conflict.
What we don't know: Whether relocation reduces conflict in some families, whether conflict changes form after a move, or how the effects differ when relocation is intended to protect a parent or child from violence.

5. How Do Children Experience Relocation?

What we know: Qualitative studies identify the importance of friendships, relationships with parents, support figures, children's involvement in decisions, and practical and emotional support. Children describe diverse experiences, including benefits, losses, and mixed feelings.
What we don't know: How representative these experiences are of all children, which children benefit most from participation in decisions, and how their views and adjustment change over time.

6. Are Younger Children More Vulnerable to Relocation?
What we know: Children's developmental needs differ by age. Relocation may change caregiving routines, contact with parents, school environments, friendships, and opportunities for age-appropriate independence.
What we don't know: Whether any particular developmental stage consistently predicts worse relocation outcomes, whether younger children experience greater long-term harm, or how developmental timing interacts with parenting arrangements and support.

7. Do Children Benefit When Relocating Parents Benefit?
What we know: Parents may seek relocation for family support, employment, improved housing, repartnering, or safety. These circumstances can change the caregiving environment and may have important implications for children.
What we don't know: Whether improvements in the relocating parent's circumstances reliably translate into improved outcomes for children, how to weigh those gains against relational losses, or which improvements have the greatest influence on child adjustment.

8. What Happens When Relocation Is Denied?
What we know: Longitudinal Australian research demonstrates that outcomes following relocation disputes are not necessarily fixed. Parents may remain, relocate later, alter parenting arrangements, or adapt to circumstances they initially opposed. Denying relocation can also involve emotional and practical consequences.
What we don't know: Whether children generally fare better when relocation is denied, how denial affects parental mental health over time, or how frequently different decisions produce unintended consequences.

9. Can Long-Distance Parenting Protect Children From Relocation-Related Risks?
What we know: Travel arrangements, extended parenting time, communication technology, financial resources, and parental cooperation influence how long-distance parenting plans can be implemented. Distance introduces practical barriers that may change everyday parent–child contact.
What we don't know: Whether virtual contact can compensate for lost in-person interaction, which parenting schedules produce the best developmental outcomes, or what amount of contact is sufficient to preserve particular relationships.

10. Can Research Predict Whether Relocation Is in a Child's Best Interests?
What we know: Research identifies potentially relevant domains, including parent–child relationships, adjustment, safety, schooling, social support, economic circumstances, and logistical feasibility. These domains can guide the collection and organization of assessment evidence.
What we don't know: How accurately these factors predict individual outcomes, how much weight each should receive, or whether existing relocation assessment frameworks can reliably distinguish children who will benefit from those who will experience harm.