

Hello, Neighborhood

Once the moving truck pulls away, how do you make your new surroundings feel like home? **BY ERIN O'DONNELL**

To get to know your new turf, you must silence your inner hermit to reach out to people you don't know. "The ideal thing is when people come to your door with cookies and introduce themselves," says Lori Collins Burgan of Tampa, author of *Moving With Kids* (Harvard Common Press) and a veteran of five moves in seven years. But people are busy, making the cookie treatment a rarity these days. That means it's up to you to gather intelligence on your new locale, Burgan says. But it's not as tough as you might think.


With your dishes still in boxes, there's no better time for takeout food. **Knock on your neighbors' door** and ask to borrow delivery and takeout menus from their favorite local joints. While you're there, ask a few questions: When are trash and recycling picked up? Who plows driveways in winter?

Join the neighborhood association. Most produce newsletters to keep you up on topics such as construction, parking, public transportation, and social events, says Joan Pickett of Cambridge, president of the Mid-Cambridge Neighborhood Association (mcna.org). MCNA even publishes a membership directory, a great resource when you're trying to remember neighbors' names.

If you have a dog, **flag down neighbors walking their pooches** to ask about local leash laws and pooper-scooper requirements, Segal says. (Your local animal control office will have these details, too.) Fellow pet owners can also share recommendations on the best nearby walks and trustworthy pet sitters.

To get a heads-up on the most common crimes in your neighborhood, **call or stop by the local police department** to request crime statistics. (To obtain Boston crime stats, you must mail or fax a request. For details, visit cityofboston.gov/police/faq.asp.)

A new neighborhood forces dogs and outdoor cats to mingle with unfamiliar animals, says Dr. Ilene Segal of the Parkway Veterinary Hospital in West Roxbury. **Be sure their vaccines are current**, she says, and update name tags with your new address, "in case they're picked up by a well-meaning neighbor who doesn't recognize them."



Stop at all yard sales, says Leslie Levine of Northbrook, Illinois, author of *Will This Place Ever Feel Like Home?* (McGraw-Hill). In addition to old exercise equipment and dusty cassette tapes, you're likely to find down-to-earth people willing to chat and share their opinions on good local mechanics or the best lunch spots.

If you have young kids, the local playground can be an informational gold mine, Burgan says. While pushing your little ones on the swings, chat with other parents. It's the perfect place to ask about pediatricians, baby-sitting co-ops, play groups, and neighborhood schools.

If you spot people on the street with great hair, ask where they have it done, Levine suggests. You'll make their day, and you may even hear about promising nearby salons.

Visit your local garden store to learn what will thrive in your new yard. (The Boston area is unusual in that it encompasses three different "plant hardiness zones," says Peter Mahoney of Mahoney's Garden Centers.) If your thumb is really green, ask store employees about nearby garden clubs.

Help school-age children acclimate by suggesting activities that will attract other kids, Burgan says. Set up a lemonade stand on your front walk, offer to host the annual pre-trick-or-treat party, or invite neighborhood kids over for snowman building and hot chocolate.

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