

Helping Your Child Become a Big Brother or Sister

Congratulations! As you look forward to the birth of your baby, you are probably experiencing various emotions – excitement and anticipation as you look forward to meeting your new infant, anxiety over how you will be able to meet the needs of both your children, and worry about how your older child will respond to the new baby. We hope this information will help all of you enjoy this new adventure.

Please remember that any changes in families can cause anxiety in children who have enjoyed a comfortable routine and attention. A new baby can add to the anxiety as the older child feels he has lost control of his world. Expect that your firstborn may “regress” and show some behaviors normally seen in younger children during the early times of adjustment. Please don’t push your child to try any new “grown up” behaviors, such as toilet learning, when she is adjusting to a new baby at home.

Before the new baby arrives - - -

1. If your child asks “why?” you are having a new baby, don’t try to find a reason. Just explain simply that your family is having another baby. (There is no way to explain your decision to a child – just as you would never understand your partner saying he/she brought home a younger/cuter person to enhance the family’s love for each other!)
2. Allow your child to make many small decisions every day so she still feels some sense of control in her life. Let her choose her clothing, her food, the books to read.
3. Use “emotion” words with your child so he becomes used to hearing and using words like “excited”, “disappointed”, and “sad”. This will help him learn to use words to express his emotions rather than actions.
4. Let the older sibling feel the baby’s movements.
5. Allow your child to have “mixed-up” emotions about the new baby. She does not have to be excited ALL the time. Let her know that it is acceptable to express her disappointment that a new baby is coming (or has arrived).
6. Choose some small gifts and wrap them so you will have them available for your older child or encourage relatives and friends to bring a small surprise for the older sibling (especially if they are coming with a gift for baby) to the hospital!
7. Choose one nice gift for the baby to bring home from the hospital to the big brother or big sister. (Someone who brings me a gift can’t be all bad!)
8. **MAKE CERTAIN** that your older child is sleeping **NOW** in the same place he will be sleeping when the new baby comes home. Make any changes **several months** before the baby’s expected birth.
9. Let your child help you make choices for the new baby. Maybe she can select the color of the new blanket, a new toy for the baby, or decide where the crib will be placed. This can help an older sibling feel they are playing an important role in the new baby’s arrival. Especially for older children, the more their “investment” in the new baby, the more likely they may develop feelings of affection for the new baby even before the baby is born.
10. Let your child play with a doll and learn how to hold a baby properly. You can also teach him what “gentle” means – soft, slow, and quiet.

11. Read books about becoming a big brother or big sister (such as *Peter's Chair* by Ezra Jack Keats). There are also lovely books which show the unborn baby's development that children can enjoy. You can also show your child his own baby pictures.
12. Set aside a special place – a box, a drawer, a cupboard – for the toys that your older child will not have to share. This is also a great way to keep small toys away from the younger infant.
13. Let your child come with you to your medical appointments. Some hospitals have a sibling preparation class which may be helpful.
14. You may want to tape record yourself reading some bedtime stories so your child can listen to them while you are in the hospital.

While Mom is in the hospital:

1. Try to keep your older child's daily routine the same.
2. When your child comes to visit in the hospital, greet her without the newborn in your arms.
3. If possible, do let your older child come to the hospital to visit and hold the new baby. Don't forget to bring home baby's gift to your firstborn.
4. Ask your older child to take care of something at home while mom is in the hospital – watering a plant or caring for a pet will make him feel responsible.

After you come home:

1. Be very careful about the older child holding the new baby. You can help him sit in a chair or couch so that the baby will be safe.
2. Let your older child help take care of the new baby. He can bring the diapers, put on lotion, and choose the outfit for the baby to wear. This not only can help boost the older sibling's self-esteem but also can help prevent them from feeling like they are competing with the baby for your attention.
3. Consider having a doll or stuffed animal that the older sibling can care for as their "baby." If the older sibling is jealous for your attention when you are feeding the baby, you could tell the older sibling, "I am feeding the baby. It's time for you to feed your baby, too."
4. When both children need you at the same time, choose to take care of the older child first. She needs to know that you are still there to take care of her. Your baby can wait for a few minutes to eat.
5. Talk to your baby about how wonderful the big brother or big sister is. "Your big brother can ride a tricycle. He will teach you how when you are older."
6. Interpret the baby's behavior in a positive light for the older child. "See how your baby enjoys holding your hand. She likes you."
7. Let your child hear you using emotion words. "I am disappointed I can't take you to the park right now."
8. Take pictures of each of your children – separately – and together.
9. Arrange your day so you can spend some time just with your older child. Give him extra hugs and kisses.