Adjusting to a New Baby in the Family

Having a new baby in the family is exciting. But new babies can mean changes for every member of the family. Here are some tips to help all of you adjust. Mom and Dad, enjoy your children – these years pass quickly!

Tips for dad
You may face a number of challenges during the first few weeks home. You are the sounding board for the whole family.
• When you come home from work, your wife will be very tired from handling the baby and other children all day. (The second child can be the most frustrating because mom is not able to do all the same things she did with the first.)
• Your older children may be frustrated after dealing with mom all day. Greet them first, before the baby, to make them feel important. Listen, and allow them to air their feelings.
• Do things with the older children – shop, mow the lawn, fix the car or play games. Let them act as your “helper,” even if it takes more time to get things done.
• If you can, take care of the baby for a while and allow mom to spend some time alone with the older children
• Help with the housework to ease things for mom and give her a chance to build her strength.

Tips for mom
• Keep in mind that you will not be able to do things exactly the same for the second child as you did for the first. For example, sometimes you may need to let the baby cry a bit while you finish reading a story to your older child.
• Take care of yourself, even though you are handling many things at once. Make sure you get enough rest and eat well. Let others help you with meals and housework.
• Spend time alone with your older child (or children). Give them extra hugs and praise. When people notice the new baby, point out the other children, as well (for example, “Andrea is such a good big sister”).

How children may react to the baby
How children react to a new baby depends on their age and personality, how mature they are, and how much they know about how the baby came to be. Here are some general guidelines:
• 1-year-olds usually are not aware of the pregnancy. Two-year-olds may notice changes in mother’s appearance.
• 3- and 4-year-olds may want to hear stories about their own beginning. They may be interested in how the baby is fed and what it wears. They like to hear the heartbeat.
• 4- and 5-year-olds are more interested in the birth process than in conception.
• School-age children want more details about pregnancy, enjoy being included in preparations, and see themselves as mothers and fathers.
• Early and middle teens may find it hard to accept their parents’ sexual activity and are establishing their own sexual identity. Some are embarrassed by their parents’ pregnancy.
• Late teens are not very disturbed by pregnancy and act more like adults.

Ways to deal with jealousy
Some jealousy between siblings is normal – even healthy. Be open and honest with your children. If an outburst of jealousy happens, try these tips:
• Encourage them to talk about their feelings to find out why they feel jealous.
• Allow them to act out with dolls or puppets, or express their feelings through artwork.
• Don’t argue. Logic usually does not work.
• Make it clear that you will not allow them to harm the baby.
• Try joining a parent support group in your community or asking your health care provider for advice – they can help.