



Helping Siblings Adjust to a New Baby

Accepting your love toward a new baby may be hard for a sibling (sister or brother). Siblings may feel that the new baby is an intruder into their world. Now they will have to “share” their parents with this new little stranger. It’s normal for the big brother or sister to be jealous and show behaviors such as:

- Demanding a bottle or breast again, wetting the bed, lying in the baby’s crib (in other words, needing to be “babied”).
- Showing anger to mom or ignoring mom out of fear of becoming attached again.
- Acting angry, showing a temper, looking for a fight to get attention.
- Clinging to mom, becoming more dependent and helpless.
- Hurting the baby through play or handling the baby roughly.
- Appearing to love the baby more than is normal.
- Making statements like “you don’t love me,” which may mean, “you love the baby more than me.”

Here are some ideas to think about as you prepare your child for living with a new brother or sister.

Preparing the child for baby’s arrival

- Avoid telling the child how to feel about the baby coming. Rather, recognize and explore the child’s feelings, whatever they are.
- Show the child picture books about new babies and, if possible, visit someone who just had a baby so your child sees this is not going to be an instant playmate. Be realistic about what babies can do – be clear that they do little but eat, sleep and cry.
- Take out old photo albums and look together at pictures of your child as an infant.
- Make changes such as moving your child to a big bed, completing toilet training, or giving up the bottle, well before the new baby’s arrival, so the child will feel that he or she is growing up, not being pushed out.

- Involve your older child in making decisions when appropriate, such as choosing a name and an outfit to bring baby home in, or deciding who will take care of them when you are in the hospital.

Preparing for your hospital stay

- Make frequent phone calls to your child.
- Don’t allow other visitors when your child comes to see you in the hospital. Devote special time just to your child when he/she first arrives. Be sure he or she understands that you will not be coming home right away.
- Have pictures of the baby for your child to show at home or school.
- Be ready for any reactions: your child may cry when it is time to go home, or may even ignore you because you have not been home with him or her.

When baby comes home

- If possible, let your child come to the hospital with whoever is picking up you and their new little brother or sister. On the other hand, if your child is home when you arrive, have someone else carry the baby into the house so you can devote special attention to your child for at least a few minutes.
- Have a present to give to your child from the new baby.
- Ask visitors to wait a day or two before they come over, so you have time to spend with your older child and take care of the baby.
- Involve your older child in baby care in small ways, such as letting him choose outfits or bring diapers.
- Let your child satisfy his or her own curiosity with the baby while you are in the room. Usually it is short-lived. Be aware of how you say things. For example, instead of “Don’t touch the baby you could hurt him,” say something like, “Let me sit you in this big chair so you can hold the baby.”
- Set aside a special time to be with your older child without the baby. Make it special to be the big brother or sister, such as having a treat in the evening that babies can’t eat or drink.

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- If negative behaviors occur, acknowledge them and use the appropriate discipline you have used in the past.
- He or she may want to talk “baby talk,” ride in the stroller, or drink from a baby bottle. Let your child if you can. Soon, your child will realize that it is nicer to be big and to do things that are more grown-up.
- If the adjustment to the baby’s arrival is not going well, call your child’s health care provider, who may refer you to community parenting support groups.

Resources for helping children adjust to a new baby

- *The New Baby* by Fred Rogers (Ages 3-12)
- *Waiting for Baby* by Rachel Fuller (Ages 2-7)
- *Before You Were Born* by Jennifer Davis (Ages 3-9)
- *The New Baby at Your House* by Joanna Cole (Ages 4-12)
- *What Can Our Baby Do* by Joan Holub (Ages 4-8)
- *Best Milk* (Book to describe and explain breastfeeding) by Kate Carothers (Ages 3-8)
- *We Have a Baby* by Cathryn Falwell (Ages 1 to 3)
- *The Berenstain Bears’ New Baby* by Stan Berenstain (Ages 2 to 7)
- *A Baby Sister for Frances* by Russel Hoban (Ages 3 to 7)
- *When the New Baby Comes, I’m Moving Out* by Martha Alexander (Ages 3 to 7)
- *See How You Grow* by Dr. Patricia Pearse (Ages 6 to 12)
- *Hey What About Me?* (video) by Kid Vidz Productions (Ages 5 and older)

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The information presented is intended for general information and educational purposes. It is not intended to replace the advice of your health care provider. Contact your health care provider if you believe you have a health problem.