

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 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 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 using actions.
4. 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).
5. Choose some small gifts and wrap them so you will have them available for your older child to open when friends bring gifts for the new baby.
6. Choose one nice gift for the baby to bring home from the hospital to give to the big brother or big sister. (Someone who brings me a gift can’t be all bad!)
7. 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.
8. 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.
9. 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.
10. Read books about becoming a big brother or big sister. There are also lovely books that show the unborn baby’s development that children can enjoy. You can also show your child his own baby pictures.
11. 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.

12. Let your child come with you to your medical appointments, if possible. Some hospitals also have a sibling preparation class which may be helpful.
13. 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 infant 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 important and helpful.

AFTER YOU COME HOME

1. Do let your child hold the new baby. You can help him sit in a chair or couch so the baby will be safe.
2. Let your older child help take care of the new baby. She can bring the diapers, put on the lotion, and choose the outfit for the baby to wear.
3. When both children need you at the same time, choose to take care of the older child first. He needs to know that you are still there to take care of him. Your baby can wait for a few minutes to eat.
4. Talk to your baby about how wonderful the big brother or big sister is. "You are so lucky to have a big brother. Your big brother can ride a tricycle. He will teach you how when you are older."
5. Interpret the baby's behavior in a positive light for the older child. "See how your baby enjoys hold your hand. She likes you."
6. Let your child hear you using emotion words. "I am disappointed I cannot take you to the park right now."
7. Take pictures of each of your children – separately, as well as together.
8. Arrange your day so you can spend some time just with your older child and give her extra hugs and kisses.
9. Let your older child hear you telling another adult how much you appreciate her and her help.

For additional information see *Welcoming your Second Baby* by Vicki Lansky

Books for children about new babies include:

The New Baby at Your House by Joanna Cole

The New Baby by Fred Rogers (Mister Rogers)

That New Baby by Sarah Stein

Let Me Tell You About My Baby by Roslyn Banish

The Berenstain Bears' New Baby by Stan and Jan Berenstain

A Baby Sister for Frances by Russell and Lillian Hoban

Used with permission: Jane E. Anderson, M.D. "Prescriptions for Parents"

