

Welcoming a New Sibling:

How to Help Your Child Adjust

Welcoming a new baby into your family is exciting! However, along with the excitement comes change.

Keep in mind that children of different ages may react differently to a new baby. Knowing what to expect from each age-group can make it easier to handle the changes in your family. Also, keep in mind that children have different personalities that may affect how they respond.

Here is information from the American Academy of Pediatrics to help parents prepare older siblings (big brothers and big sisters) for a new sibling (little brother or little sister).

Children Aged 1 to 2 Years

Children aged 1 to 2 years may not understand what it means to have a new sibling. However, you can bring up the topic with your child so that she can get used to the idea. Also, it's important to reassure her that she is loved.

Before Your New Baby Arrives

- **Read children's books about newborns and siblings with your child.** She can become familiar with words such as *sister*, *brother*, and *new baby*.

After Your New Baby Arrives

- **Make sure the focus isn't all on your new baby.** Here are 2 ideas.
 1. Give your child a special gift.
 2. Plan a one-on-one date with your child. This can be with Mom, Dad, grandparents, or other family members.
- **Explain to your child that sometimes you need to take care of baby first.** Although older siblings can help with feeding time or baby's bath time, your baby needs one-on-one time too.

Children Aged 2 to 4 Years

Children aged 2 to 4 years are learning how to share with others and may feel as if they need to compete for your attention. They may also have a difficult time adjusting to changes in your family's routine.

Before Your New Baby Arrives

- **Find chances to talk about baby.** For example, you can mention that a new baby will be in the family when you start buying nursery furniture or baby clothes or when your child starts asking about Mom's growing belly. Consider signing up for a siblings class, if your hospital offers one. Continue to read children's books about newborns and siblings with your child.

- **Remind your child when she was a baby.** Show your child her baby pictures. If you are going to use some of her old baby things, let her play with them a bit before you get them ready for the new baby. Buy your child a doll so that she can take care of "her" baby. This helps explain what being around a baby is like.
- **Be honest.** Explain that the baby will be cute but will also cry and take a lot of your time and attention. Also, make sure your child knows that it may be a while before she can play with the new baby and, when she plays or helps care for baby, that she needs to be gentle. Reassure your child that you will love her just as much after the baby is born, as you do now.
- **Involve your child in planning for baby.** This will make her less jealous. Let her shop with you for baby items.
- **Time major changes in your child's routine.** If you can, finish toilet training or switching from a crib to a bed before the baby arrives. If that is not possible, put it off until after the baby is settled at home. Otherwise, your child may feel overwhelmed by trying to learn new things on top of all the changes caused by the new baby.
- **Tell your child about Mom's and baby's hospital stay.** You can tell your child that you and the new baby will need to stay in the hospital until the doctor says it's OK to go home.

After Your New Baby Arrives

- **Expect your child to regress a little.** Children may go back to an earlier stage in their development when a new baby arrives. They will act like a baby to get attention. For example, your child might want to drink from a baby bottle. Instead of telling her to act her age, give her the attention she needs. You may tell her that whenever she feels upset to whisper in your ear, "I need attention." When she does, respond as quickly as possible. Praise her when she acts more grown-up.
- **Set aside special time for your child.** Read, play games, listen to music, or simply talk together. Show her that you love her and want to do things with her. Also, make her feel that she is a part of things by having her cuddle next to you when you feed the baby.
- **Find ways to invite your child to help.** You want to make sure your child feels included and not excluded. This helps build a bond between siblings, reduce jealousy, and promote curiosity.
- **Ask family and friends to spend time with your older child when they come to see the new baby.** This will help her feel special and not left out. Some family and friends may also give her a small gift when they bring gifts for the baby.
- **Have your child spend time with Dad or another family member.** A new baby is a great opportunity for fathers and other family members to spend time alone with older children.

School-aged Children

Children older than 5 years are usually not as threatened by a new baby as younger children are. However, they may resent the attention the new baby gets.

Before Your New Baby Arrives

- **Tell your child what is happening in words she can understand.** Explain what having a new baby means and what changes may affect her.
- **Have your child help get things ready for the new baby.** Your child can help fix up the baby's room, pick out clothes, or buy diapers.

After Your New Baby Arrives

- **Have someone bring your child to the hospital to meet her new sibling, if your child is not already at the hospital.** This will help her feel that she is part of the growing family.
- **When you bring baby home, help your older child feel that she has a role to play in caring for the baby.** Tell her she can hold the baby, although she must ask you first. Teach her how to hold the baby. Praise her when she is gentle and loving toward the baby.

- **Do not overlook your older child's needs and activities.** Let her know how much you love her. Make an effort to spend some time alone with her each day; use that as a chance to remind her how special she is.

Important Information for Parents

- **Ask for help if you feel overwhelmed.** Accept help from your partner, relatives, and friends. It's important that you also make time to care for yourself.
- **Remember to make time for your partner.** Children of couples who have a strong and loving relationship are more likely to adjust well to the new baby. Taking time to nurture your relationship with your partner can ease the transition to having a new baby for everyone.

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