

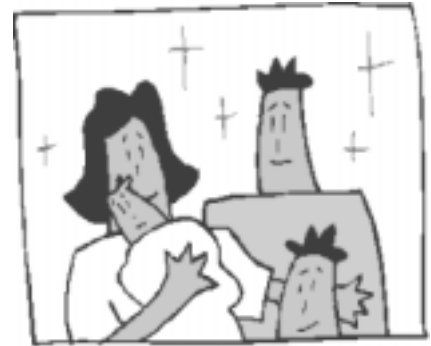


Preparing Your Child for the Arrival of a Baby

The arrival of a baby brother or sister is a stressful experience in the life of a young child. It is common for children to feel anger and jealousy towards a new baby.

Research indicates that the gap in age between siblings can have an effect on the intensity of jealousy between children. Sibling rivalry tends to be greatest when the age difference is 18 months to 2 years. It tends to be lowest when there are more than 2 years between children or less than 18 months.

Regardless of the age of an older brother or sister, a parent can play an important role in helping a child cope with the arrival of a new baby in the family. Use the time before the baby arrives to help your child gain an understanding of “babies” and begin to feel the importance of being a “big brother” or “big sister.”



Here are some activities you can do to help prepare your child:

- Share with your child memories of her infancy. Show her pictures of when she was a baby. Talk about how little she was, and how she couldn't sit or walk or feed herself.
- Sort through baby clothes with your child. Together, choose the clothes that will fit the new baby soon after he or she arrives. This activity will help your child develop an idea of how little the baby will be.
- Talk to your child and show her all the items the baby will be using: a crib, a carriage, a baby bath, a car seat. Don't be surprised if your child crawls into the carriage or crib. She is trying to figure out this new event!
- Help your child take care of a doll. Slowly introduce the idea that babies need lots of time and care. Let him give the doll a bath in the new baby's tub. This will be a good time to talk about how gentle you have to be when caring for a baby.
- Read stories with your child about being a big sister or big brother. Choose books that help your child cope with the normal feelings of jealousy.
- Visit a friend with a new baby to see the size of the infant.
- Make something together for the new baby. Choose something simple and easy to complete, like a “Quiet!” sign for the door or a picture to go over the crib.
- Teach your child a simple lullaby to sing to her new brother or sister.

- Plan the baby’s room together and take him on a shopping trip to buy some items for the new baby. Remember to buy something for him as well.
- If you plan to breastfeed, try to arrange for your child to see a woman breastfeeding her baby. Your child will adjust more easily if she knows what to expect.
- If the baby will be born in a nearby hospital, visit the hospital with your child.
- Tell your child who will be caring for him while mother is in the hospital or while mother and/or dad is receiving a baby to be adopted. Let him know the activities he will do with his caregiver while you are gone.
- If your child is staying with a relative or friend, involve him in packing the suitcase for the trip. Also, let your child help you pack your suitcase or the suitcase of your spouse or partner. Help him understand that you will come back and won’t be away for long.
- Answer all questions about new babies and the birth process or adoption as simply as possible, but truthfully. Read a book to your child about pregnancy, birth and/or adoption that is appropriate to your child’s age and development.
- Be careful not to make any unrealistic promises, for example, “You’re going to have someone to play with.”

Here are some additional helpful hints:

- Have a special present ready to give to your older child when you arrive home with the baby.
- Let someone else carry the new baby into the house so your arms will be free to hug the new “big” sister or brother. Together, you can go to meet the new baby.
- Once in awhile, hold your child in the new baby’s rocking chair. Talk about how sometimes it’s fun to be a big brother or sister, and sometimes it’s fun to pretend to be a baby.
- Be sure to spend special times with each of your children before the baby arrives. Continue to do this after the baby comes.

Let your child know there will be times when he or she is unhappy or angry with the new baby. Jealousy is a normal feeling. Talking about feelings sometimes helps children accept and deal with their negative feelings. Remember, older brothers and sisters must be told over and over that they must handle babies gently.

It is normal for older children to revert to “infant” ways when a new baby arrives home. For example, they may begin to talk like a baby or want to drink from a bottle. They may revert to bedwetting, whining, and crying instead of talking. This behavior will go away faster if you don’t pay much attention to it.

Some young children will show feelings of jealousy when the baby begins to move around and compete with siblings. Watch for behaviors that show that older siblings are feeling angry or threatened. Accept and recognize your older children’s feelings. Spend time with each of them on an individual basis. The arrival of a new baby is stressful. With your help, however, siblings will be able to adjust successfully to this important family event.

Sources:

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