



Preparing For a New Baby

There's a lot of information out there for parents about bringing home a new baby, but what about when the new baby isn't your first? Although a new baby brings joy and excitement, it can also make older brothers and sisters feel nervous and angry towards the family's newest member. In addition to getting your home ready for a new baby, it's important that you also focus on preparing the rest of the family.

What can parents do **before the baby is born?**

- Show your child pictures, stories and video of their newborn days. Kids love to hear stories about what life was like when they were a baby.
- Try and keep routines as normal as possible in the weeks before and after your baby's arrival.
- Try to avoid big changes like moving, changing caregivers, moving to a big-girl/boy bed, potty training, getting rid of the pacifier, starting preschool, etc. If siblings must undergo these changes because of the new baby, start them as early as possible (at least several weeks before).
- Remember, nine months is a long time for anyone to wait, and young children don't have a good sense of time. Put off your new baby discussion until you're showing and when you do, use a calendar to mark the days, or talk about how the baby will arrive in a particular season (like when it's hot outside), or after an event (when school gets out for the summer).
- Involve older brothers and sisters as much as they want to be. Let their questions be the guide. If they want, let them to join you at doctor's appointments, view sonogram pictures, listen to the heartbeat, etc.
- Be specific about what the new baby's arrival will be like ("Mommy will be very tired at first," "The baby will cry and sleep a lot, and won't be ready to play for a while.").
- Let your older children know that you will be gone during the birth of the new baby (how long you will be out of the house, where they will stay). Remember, how you act lets your child know how to feel. If you seem sad, they will feel sad too.
- Use role-playing with dolls to talk about your toddler's feelings and what life will be like with a new brother or sister.

What can parents do after the baby is born?

- Allow your children to visit you and meet the new baby soon after he/she is born. This will help to show that it is a special, family event.
- Have big-brother/sister gifts waiting from the new baby for when they first meet him/her.
- Try not to make comparisons between children like, “He’s much calmer than you were,” or “You cried a lot more.”
- Don’t be concerned if your toddler doesn’t seem interested in the new baby. Sibling relationships have a lifetime to develop.
- Older child may also suddenly want to act like a baby. That is perfectly normal and caregivers should try and be understanding.
- Remind visitors to pay attention to your older kids too. It can be upsetting for your child to see all of the presents that the newborn receives, especially when people don’t bring something for him or her.
- Try not to blame the baby when you are not available (“Mommy can’t play with you now because I have to feed the baby,” or “Mommy needs to change the baby, so you need to read to yourself”). Blaming new babies can cause problems between children.
- Allow toddlers to be helpers (getting a diaper ready, reading the baby a story, pushing the carriage, etc.).
- Remind your toddler of the things they can do because they are older (eating food, playing with toys, going to the playground).
- Try to give each child alone time with each caregiver (if possible).

What if problems arise?

- Research shows that children two years of age and under have more difficulty adjusting to a new sibling because they still have strong needs for parents’ time and closeness.
- Remember, even the most well-meaning siblings can play too rough or hug too hard in the beginning, so show them how to play gently with the new baby. Teach children from the beginning that absolutely no hurting or rough play is allowed.
- Focus on the positive behaviors your child shows to their new sibling (“I like the way you stroked the baby’s leg,” or “I like to see you touch the baby so gently.”)

Most importantly, try not to worry. The first few months are a big adjustment for everyone.