

Preparing Children for a New Baby

What can I expect as I prepare my children for a new baby?

Many experts believe “sibling rivalry” (or jealousy between brothers and sisters) is normal among children who are looking for love and attention from the same parents. Unnecessary rivalry may develop when a child doesn’t understand the changes taking place and feels left out. You can reduce unnecessary rivalry with a plan to prepare and involve your child or children with the new baby.

A new baby is a disruption for any child. Some older children will lose physical space (such as a bedroom) and their belongings. Some will lose their special “place” in the family. As parents, you can encourage future good feelings between siblings by making sure your child or children understand the process of pregnancy and childbirth and feel included. An older child will benefit and feel proud of a new relationship with a brother or sister and a new status in the family.

Positive sibling relationships can last a lifetime , much longer than a relationship with a spouse or child. Many parents feel the thought and energy invested in getting the relationship off to a good start is worth the effort.

What can I do to prepare my child for a new baby?

- Include your child in as many preparation activities as possible that relate to getting ready for the new baby. For example, call grandparents to talk about the progress of your pregnancy include your child in the discussion about

the baby's name or let them help prepare the baby's room. The goal is to make them feel included and involved.

- Talk openly with your child about how you are feeling regarding the pregnancy and the new baby. Let them know that you are excited but that adjustments need to be made. Expressing occasional negative feelings gives them permission to do the same.
- Tell your older child stories about their birth and babyhood. Children are fascinated by this, and it may help them feel a connection with their own roots as a baby. These stories can be soothing for them after the baby's birth as well.
- Make any changes in your older child's room or bed slowly, well before the birth. These changes can be positive and exciting for them.
- Help your older child express their feelings through art work. Have children make pictures as gifts for the baby and hang them near the crib.
- Respond openly to your child's questions about conception, fetal development, and birth. Try not to give too much information or over-explain.
- Use this time to talk about sex differences. A mother's pregnancy often raises questions about a child's own sexuality, and children may have misunderstandings. Use books and videos designed for children about conception, baby's development in the womb, pregnancy, labor, birth, newborns, and relationships between brothers and sisters. You can use newborn baby dolls to demonstrate a newborn's limited capabilities.
- Talk about how your newborn will be fed. This can be a sensitive area for your older child. Find activities they can do (either with you or alone) while the baby is being fed.
- Let your child decide which toys he or she does not want to share with the baby. Respect their need to identify private property.
- Consider having your child begin an activity (gymnastics, skating, play group, etc.) that makes them feel more grown up. Many children enjoy

becoming more independent in response to a new baby. Focus on their maturity but understand that they may need to be a “baby” once in a while. You may consider a baby-sitter who will care for your baby while you have alone time with your older child.

What can I do to help my child while mom is away in the hospital?

- Make sure your child knows that, even though the baby is born in a hospital, no one is sick or in danger. Talk about what it will be like for mom while she is in the hospital.
- Talk with your child about who will be caring for them while mom is in the hospital. The ideal situation is for your child to stay home with a very familiar person.
- Stay “connected” with your child while you are separated. Make a tape recording of yourself reading bedtime stories. Have your child help you pack their artwork for your hospital room. Consider giving your child small wrapped presents for each day you are away.
- Let your older child know he or she may visit as soon as possible after the birth. This will be reassuring to them. It’s hard to know exactly how your child will react during a visit. They could be excited, angry, very interested, or totally uninterested in the new baby. It’s important for your older child to have plenty of time with mom on that first visit and to see, touch, and explore the baby. Leaving after the visit can be upsetting for your child. A special event (like an ice cream cone) after the visit may help. Daily visits are ideal for many children but may be too much for some young children.

What can I do to help my child after mom comes home with the baby?

- Plan a celebration for your older child that focuses on their new status as a big brother or sister. Consider allowing them to hand out treats to friends as a way of telling them about the new baby. Or, have a special dinner where your older child is the “guest of honor.”

- Have someone else carry the baby into the house so that mom can focus all of her attention on the older child for a while. It's hard to predict the reaction of your child when you come home. A young child who has been lonely may be distant at first. A very excited child may be disruptive.
- Supervise your child's interactions with the new baby until you are comfortable with the progress of their relationship. Many younger children are not safe to leave alone with the baby. They may act out their jealousy physically or simply be unaware of the consequences of their actions.
- Spend alone time with your older child or children each day. Even a small amount of focused attention can be meaningful for an older child who feels left out. Your older child will thrive on individual time spent alone with you. Ideally, the baby is not in the room during this special time together.

What are some good books for parents on adding a new sibling into the family?

- *From One Child to Two: What to Expect, How to Cope, and How to Enjoy Your Growing Family*, by Judy Dunn
- *And Baby Makes Four: Welcoming a Second Child into the Family*, by Hilory Wagner

Are there any good books I can read to my child to help with adjusting to the new baby?

Toddlers

- *We Have a Baby*, by Cathryn Falwel
Simple text and illustrations. What can you do with a new baby?
- *The New Baby* by Fred Rogers
For toddlers and preschoolers. Nice photos of families working together and sharing.
- *Our New Baby*, by Wendy Cheyette Lewison

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Great photos and simple text for very young children

- *How A Baby Grows*, by Nola Buck
- *My Baby Brother Has Ten Tiny Toes*, by Laura Leuck
- *101 Things to do with a Baby*, by Jan Ormerod
- *Spot's Baby Sister*, by Eric Hill
- *Sisters*, by Debbie Bailey & Susan Huszar
- *Baby Born*, by Anastasia Suen

Preschoolers

- *Julius, the Baby of the World*, by Kevin Henkes
Lilly thinks all the attention given to her baby brother Julius is “disgusting!” but then she finds inside herself a fierce love and protectiveness.
- *A Baby for Max*, by Kathryn Lasky & Maxwell Knight
A small boy’s view of his new baby sister – as told in his own words, with black and white photos
- *Will there be a lap for me?*, by Dorothy Corey
When a boy’s mother is pregnant, her lap gets smaller and smaller. After the baby is born, she is very busy, but she makes some special time for her older son.
- *When the New Baby Comes, I’m Moving Out* and *Nobody Asked Me if I Wanted a Baby Sister*, by Martha Alexander
Oliver expresses his feelings about having a baby sister.
- *Alligator Baby*, by Robert Munsch
A silly spoof, where the older sister is the hero!
- *Aren’t You Lucky!*, by Catherine & Laurence Anholt
The big sister doesn’t feel very lucky to have this new baby around
- *Big Brother, Little Brother*, by Penny Dale
Brothers can make each other feel better.
- *A New Baby at Koko Bear’s House*, by Vicky Lansky

Includes tips for parents at the bottom of each page

- *Oonga Boonga*, by Carol Thompson
The big brother is the only one who can calm the baby
- *A Place for Ben*, by Jeanne Titherington
Ben's baby brother moves into his room
- *Waiting for Baby* and *Talk, Baby!*, by Harriet Ziefert
Fun books – kids like them.
- *How You Were Born, I'm a Big Brother*, and *I'm a Big Sister*, by Joanna Cole
- *Arthur's Baby*, by Marc Brown
Lift-the-flap boardbook.
- *The New Baby*, by Mercer Mayer

Preschool through school-age

- *Being Born*, by Sheila Kitzinger & Lennart Nilsson
Simple text and color photos explain conception through birth
- *Before You Were Born: The Inside Story and Baby Science*, by Ann Douglas
Fun science books about pregnancy and what babies are like to help prepare the big sibling.
- *Mommy's in the Hospital Having a Baby*, by Maxine Rosenberg
From the child's point of view, tells what to expect when mom goes into the hospital to give birth to new baby sibling.
- *Darcy and Gran Don't Like Babies*, by Jane Cutler
Darcy's grandma helps her with her complex feelings towards the new baby.
- *A Baby Sister for Frances*, by Russell & Lillian Hoban
- *Welcoming Babies*, by Margy Burns Knight
Describes difference cultures' welcoming traditions
- *The New Baby at Your House*, by Joanna Cole

Ages 3-6. Great photos and simple discussion of what it is like to have a new baby, and older children's feelings about the baby.

- *Hello Baby!*, by Lizzy Rockwell

Ages 4-8. An older brother explains the baby's prenatal development and birth in simple, straightforward terms.

- *My New Baby and Me: A First Year Record Book for Big Brothers and Sisters*, by Dian Smith

- *Arthur's Baby*, by Marc Brown

- *Pinky and Rex and the New Baby*, by James Howe

For older school-aged kids. Rex's family adopts a new baby, and she tries to be a perfect big sister, while worrying that her parents will forget about her.

Are there any videos for kids that deal with new baby siblings?

- *Arthur's Baby*
- *Sesame Street: A New Baby in My House*

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