

Preparing for a New Sibling

Regardless of the age of your child or whether they already have a sibling, the addition of a new child to your family will be a significant change for them. Here are some steps you can take to preempt any behavioral or emotional challenges through this exciting transition for your family.

How do I talk to my child about their new sibling?

- Follow your child's lead in terms of how much information you share with them. Your child may have many questions for you, or none at all. Keep your answers short and simple, and use child-friendly language.
- If someone in your family is giving birth, it is suggested that you wait until the second trimester to share the news of a new baby, to ensure that the pregnancy is in a healthy place. Since the second trimester is when physical changes tend to show, your child may naturally begin asking questions then.
- However, if the pregnancy causes morning sickness or other challenges, it may be logical to talk with your child sooner, since they will notice these changes and may be concerned or confused.
- Young children do not yet have a solid grasp of time, so saying that a new sibling will arrive "in a few months" likely won't mean much to them. Instead, use an event or season as a reference, such as "Your little brother will be joining us this summer!"
- Be reassuring but honest. Let them know that you will continue to love them and that you will also love the new baby. Tell them that the baby won't be able to play with them for a while, but that there are still many different ways they can interact.

Preparing Your Child for a New Infant:

- Play with baby dolls to show your child how to interact with the baby carefully. Encourage them to touch and speak gently, and sing songs to the baby. You can also visit friends or family with infants and observe them together.
- You can read age-appropriate books about childbirth or siblings to help answer your child's questions. You can also go through their own baby photos or baby books to remind them that they were once a baby too.
- Involve your child in the preparations: ask for baby name ideas, invite them to help you pack a hospital bag, ask them to help you decorate the nursery, or bring your child to a simple doctor's appointment. Shortly before birth, explain what the plan will be for them during the birth so they know what to expect.
- Begin making any necessary changes to your home and routine several weeks before the baby arrives to give your child time to adjust, such as moving bedrooms or rearranging furniture.
- However, if your child is approaching a major developmental milestone (such as toilet training, or moving from a crib to a bed), make those changes well before the baby arrives, or wait until your family is more adjusted to your new life.

Recommended Books About Where Babies Come From:

- *Before You Were Born: the Inside Story*, by Ann Douglas
- *Where Do Babies Come From? Our First Talk about Birth*, by Dr. Jillian Roberts
- *What Makes a Baby*, by Cory Silverberg



What can I expect from my child after a new sibling arrives?

Expect your child to have mixed reactions about a new sibling, and have empathy for how hard the change is for them. Show your understanding, and be calm and reassuring. Although they may have been excited before the baby arrived, they may feel very differently once their new sibling is at home. Your child may act out in different ways, such as throwing tantrums, or being “clingy.” It is important to acknowledge their feelings, while reassuring and showing them that they are still just as important to you. You can support them through these big emotional moments by helping them to identify and appropriately express their feelings. For example:

- *I know it can be hard for you to wait for me while I feed your sister. You really want to play with me right now. Instead of screaming, you can say “It is hard when I have to wait for you”. It is tricky to wait, but I will let you know when I’m done and then we will be able to play. Thank you for telling me how you feel.*

Your child may not accept the new baby right away, and that is okay. Give them the time and space they need to feel connected to their new sibling, while remaining connected to you. Follow your child’s lead with how much they would like to be involved with the baby without demanding too much of them. It is a big responsibility to be a big sibling, and often being pushed to be involved can actually drive them away if they are not ready.



Recommended Books About How to Be a Big Sibling:

- *What Brothers Do Best*, by Laura Numeroff
- *I’m a Big Sister*, by Joana Cole
- *Olivia: A Guide to Being a Big Sister*, by Natalie Shaw
- *The Big Sibling Book: Baby’s First Year According to Me*, by Amy

Other Ways to Support Your Child:

- When visitors come to meet the new arrival, ask them to also spend some time with the older sibling.
- When taking photos of the new baby, make sure to include or take other photos of your other child as well.
- Give your child special jobs to do to help care for the baby, if they are ready (get a clean diaper, wash the baby’s legs in the bath, open the wipes). Label these as “special sibling jobs” and get your child excited about being involved!
- Ask for your child’s input, such as what shirt the baby could wear, or what book to read or song to sing for the baby.
- Read books with your child about their new role as an older sibling.
- Spend one-on-one time with your older child, without their sibling. Even if it’s only a quick five minutes, it is important for them to understand that you still love them and want to spend time together, even with the new addition to the family.