Welcoming a New Sibling

Bringing home a new baby is a life-changing event. New demands on time and energy may be difficult for mom and dad. Also, this can be difficult for the older sibling(s) who might not understand the value of the newest twig on the family tree.

Preparing for Baby's Arrival

- Make the needed changes to older siblings' routines as early as possible, such as moving from crib to a bed, a different room, or a different child care situation. Doing it soon gives the older child an opportunity to make his or her own adjustments to the new situation without connecting it to the arrival of the new baby.
- If your older child needs toilet training, get things going early in your pregnancy. Be sure the older child is physically ready for this project. Also, some regression following the new baby's birth is normal and will go away with patience, kindness and encouragement.
- Encourage your older child to be involved in planning for the baby's arrival. Talk about toys and clothing items the new baby might need, and what it will be like to have a new baby in the household. Share stories of how things were when the older sibling was the new baby.
- Avoid telling the older sibling the new baby will be a playmate. While it's a hopeful thing, it will be too far in the future for the older sibling to understand. The inability of the newborn to play could lead to disappointment.

After Baby Arrives

Most children will have a negative reaction to a new baby at some time. This may include requests to be fed or dressed, sleep disturbances, potty accidents or demands to "send that baby back." It may happen later when the baby is more mobile and the older sibling hits or yells at the baby. All of these reactions are normal.

- The safety of your children is a primary concern. An older sibling who is a toddler or pre-schooler is not reliably in control of his or her own behavior enough to be trusted not to harm a newborn sibling and must be watched. Have sibling avoid kissing baby's face and kiss feet instead.
- Make special time to spend with the older child. It may be only a few minutes here and there, but it's important. Consider reading, taking a walk or having a treat together. This helps the older child know he or she is still loved and important to you.
- It's understandable the older sibling could resent the extra time and energy the new baby requires. If the older child misbehaves, it may be to get attention. By giving your child extra positive attention before he or she acts out, you may be able to avoid some of this misbehavior.
- Take the older sibling's developmental abilities into consideration when asking for help. An older child who is asked to help with something that is beyond his or her ability may become frustrated.
- You'll have to re-think the baby proofing of your home. Once the new baby becomes mobile, the older child's toys might pose a safety hazard.
- Take care of yourself. You are likely tired, sleep deprived, physically and emotionally drained — and you have a newborn and older child to care for! Get help from trusted people.

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To learn more, email the Family Life Educators at **familylifeeducators@avera.org**, visit **Avera.org/Childrens** or call **605-322-3660**.

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