

WELCOMING A NEW SIBLING

Bringing home a new baby is a life-changing event in any family. New demands on time and energy may be difficult for mom and dad. This can be particularly trying for the older sibling(s) who might have limited understanding of the value of the newest twig on the family tree.

Here are a few things to keep in mind as you prepare for your new baby's arrival.

- Make the needed changes to older siblings' routines as early as possible. If you need to move the older sibling from the crib to a bed, to a different room or to a different child care situation, do it well in advance of the new baby's birth. This will give 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 goal is toilet training, try to get things going as early in the pregnancy as you can. Be sure that the older child is physically ready for this project and be aware that some regression following the birth of the new baby 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 choices for names, layette 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 that the new baby will be a playmate for him or her. While we hope that eventually this will be the case, it will be much too far in the future for the older sibling to understand. The older child is likely to be very disappointed in a playmate with such a limited ability to play. The inability of the newborn to cooperate with play plans could lead to resentment from the older child.

- 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.
- Make special time to spend with the older child. It may be only a few minutes here and there, but it will be very important to the big brother or sister. This might mean a special time to read or take a walk together or even having a little treat. The idea is to let the older child know that he or she is still loved and that his or her company is important to you.
- It is understandable that the older sibling could resent the extra time and energy the new baby takes from you. If the older child misbehaves, it may be simply an effort to get your attention. If you give your child extra positive attention, before he or she acts out, you may be able to avoid some of this misbehavior.
- Always 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 or frightened of these expectations.
- You will have to re-think the baby proofing of your home. Once the new baby starts to become mobile, the toys of the older child might pose a safety hazard to the baby.
- Take care of yourself. You are likely tired, sleep deprived, physically and emotionally drained and you have a newborn to take care of. Oh, and you also have an older child! This is a lot to cope with. Get help – from your spouse, your parents, aunts, uncles and trusted friends. You can't parent either child well if you are exhausted.

**For more parenting information,
contact the Family Life Education
Office at 605-322-3660.**

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