

## Preparing a Child for a New Sibling: Overview

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### Abstract

Parents spend a lot of energy on preparations, and after the baby arrives, much of the family's attention involves caring for the newborn. All this change can be hard for older siblings to handle. But parents can prepare kids for an addition to the family. Discussing the pregnancy in terms that make sense to kids, making some arrangements, and including kids in the care of the newborn can make things easier for everyone.

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The arrival of a new baby can bring many changes to a family. Parents spend a lot of energy on preparations, and after the baby arrives, much of the family's attention involves caring for the newborn. All this change can be hard for older siblings to handle. It's common for them to feel jealousy toward the newborn and to react to the upheaval by acting out. But parents can prepare kids for an addition to the family. Discussing the pregnancy in terms that make sense to kids, making some arrangements, and including kids in the care of the newborn can make things easier for everyone.

### Before the Baby Arrives

Before the baby arrives, make any necessary changes with the older children's routine. This can include: a new bed, bedroom, babysitter, etc. Making these changes well in advance of the new baby's arrival will help them feel less displaced. Don't push for everything to be changed right away. Trying to force the child into learning skills they are not

prepared for will create more problems. This can include: potty training, no longer using a bottle, etc.

Sibling acceptance is easier when parents encourage their older children to become acquainted with the new baby before they are born. Some great ways to accomplish this are:

- Take the children to a prenatal exam.
- Have them meet the doctor and listen to the baby's heartbeat

Encourage them to feel the baby kick and move by placing their hand on their mother's stomach.

- When the mother is undergoing for an ultrasound, show them the picture and point out the body parts and how they are the same as theirs.
- Look at books on fetal development together to trace the growth of the baby.
- Read books about new babies and encourage discussion about what new babies are like and

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what changes might occur within the family.

- Spend time with the child and talk about memories of them as babies. Looking at their baby pictures with them will show that they also required a lot of extra attention at first.
- Enroll the child in a sibling presentation class at your hospital.
- Make arrangements to babysit a young baby for a day and demonstrate the care needed. Let the older child participate in the care as much as possible.
- Begin preparing the older child for the separation while mom is in the hospital. Show the older child the hospital and assure him or her that you will be home in a few days.

Consider a hospital that will allow the older child to visit the mother and the new baby in their mother's room.

- Let the older child hold the baby as much as possible when he or she wants to and let them participate in the care of the baby as much as possible.
- Ask visiting friends and relatives to greet the older child and pay attention to him or her before greeting the baby.
- If the mother is planning a school, room or bed change for the older child, do it as early in your pregnancy as possible.
- When arriving home from the hospital, let dad carry the baby in so mom's arms are free for the older child.
- Try to plan a special time each day for just mother with their older child/children.

Teaching the children the basics when it comes to a new baby is very important. Create a realistic picture for them that their new sibling will mostly eat, sleep and cry. Mother can use dolls, pictures and books to help prepare them for what an infant looks and acts like. They are often told that their new brother or sister will be fun to play with. However, they won't be a playmate for quite a while.

### **During the Hospital Stay**

If at all possible try to arrange a tour of the hospital floor with the older children. The children will be much more comfortable having their mother away from home if they know exactly where the mother will be. They will also have less anxiety when they come to visit the mother because they will recognize their surroundings.

If the children cannot come with them to the hospital while the mother are in labor, try to let them know first about the new baby. They may be able to make phone calls to some family members and friends to give them the good news about their new baby brother or sister.

Children who can visit mom during the hospital stay and have been given her phone number seem to adjust easier to her being gone. They feel more secure knowing where she is and how to reach her. When it comes time to be discharged, it may be a good idea to leave their children at home. It is often too hectic and may take much longer than planned. This can be caused by a late doctor visit or waiting for a lab test result. If children have to wait too long, they can become tired and misbehave.

Instead of the homecoming being a happy event, it could turn out to be very stressful and upsetting for both.

### **At Home**

First of all, be mindful that it is normal for siblings to be jealous of each other. All children need to feel as if they are just as important as their siblings in the eyes of their parents. The Mother job is to allow your children to express their feelings about his or her new sibling in an acceptable way. They must learn that no matter how angry they are with their new sibling, they are not allowed to hurt any other family member.

In some families the dad takes over the care of the older children while the mother tends to the newborn baby. The older child may associate dad as "his" and the baby as moms. When it is time for dad to care for the new baby, the older child/children may become more hostile. It is important for mom to set aside time to be alone with the older child/children. Encourage dad to care for the new infant while Mother spends time with the older siblings.

Some children do not express their jealousy or hostility immediately after the baby arrives home. It may not set in until the baby becomes more mobile and gets into their sibling's things. It could help to provide a special area for the older child to play with their things or to encourage them to play with special toys during the baby's nap time.

Some regression of the older child is normal when the new baby arrives home. Regression is the tendency of the older child to lapse into a younger behavior. Some want a bottle or pacifiers, and some may even start wetting their pants or bed. Mother should not encourage or punish these behaviors.

Eventually the older child will get tired of doing this and revert back to their own age level. Sometimes it is helpful to talk with the child about how lucky they are to be able to do things the baby cannot do yet.

### Conclusion

It's a big deal to be a big brother or sister. If we have a baby on the way, and our child has a lot of questions about their future role as a sibling, this class might help you what you are looking for! Through games and activities, children will learn about how the baby is born, basic baby care, and how exciting and fun it will be to be a big brother or sister. So through sibling preparation we can prepare the children, what to expect when they are visiting their mother and we can give the child a role in the experience.

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