

Helping Siblings Welcome a New Baby

Just when you thought that “baby makes three” was your biggest adjustment, along comes another sibling to add to the mix. In the long run, having a younger brother or sister will likely enrich your first child’s life, but there’s a good chance they might not agree at first.

Put yourself in their shoes. For their entire lives, they have been the center of attention within your family. Now, the new baby is taking up a lot of that attention. Family and friends are cooing over the newborn, and the older sibling is suddenly thrust into a seemingly secondary role—something they have never experienced before.

Sibling Rivalry

A certain amount of “acting out” and aggressive behavior is common as the older child struggles to hang onto their old routine. This usually starts shortly after the arrival of the second child, but sometimes even before. A certain amount of regression, or reverting back to more baby-like behavior, is typical. They may stop using their sippy cup and grab for the bottle, or their progress at potty training may slip.

Change is rarely easy for anyone, and the degree of sibling rivalry can depend on the child’s personality. Children around age two tend to have the hardest time adjusting because they still require a lot of their parents’ time and attention. Still, there are things you can do to make life easier for both of you.

Advance Notice

- Tell your child about your pregnancy before you tell other family members and friends. They need to hear about it directly from you, not someone else.
- Refer to the baby as “your little sister/brother” rather than “mommy’s new baby” or even “the new baby” to help them develop a sense of control and inclusiveness.
- Do and say things to reinforce that this new baby is an addition, not a replacement, and that your love for them will not change when the new baby arrives.
- If you are moving the child to a new bed/bedroom, try to do it as long as possible before the new baby arrives. Make an event out of it, so they can feel like it is more of a “promotion” than a displacement.
- Any other major changes like weaning, toilet training or starting preschool/childcare will go much more smoothly for both of you if they can also be done well in advance.

While You’re Waiting

- Start reading age-appropriate books and showing videos to them about having a new baby and becoming a big brother or sister. Let them ask questions, voice concerns, and vent any feelings they may have.
- Check with your hospital about sibling preparation classes and consider bringing your child to prenatal visits. Often your doctor, nurse or physician’s assistant can provide assistance in answering their questions and calming their fears.
- If you have pictures/video of your older child’s birth and babyhood, share these with your child. Tell them about their birth, what they were like as a baby, and how excited everyone was to see and hold them.
- Help them develop realistic expectations about what it will be like when the baby first arrives. Let them know you will probably be tired, and the baby will require a lot of time and attention since it will not do much more than eat, sleep, mess in its diaper and cry.
- If you have friends or family with a new baby, see if they will let you take your child along on visits. Help your child to understand that people are always excited when a new baby is born.
- Get a life-size baby doll, and help your child practice holding it, supporting the head, and touching it gently.
- Let your child participate in any preparations you can, like allowing them to choose the baby’s coming home outfit from a couple of options.

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The Big Day

- If “Dad” is going to be in the delivery room with you, be sure to make arrangements well in advance to have at least one or two reliable friends or family members “on call” to watch your older child during the birth.
- Although it may be tempting to leave your older child at grandma’s house for a week or so while you get settled with the new baby, it is really best not to do this unless your doctor recommends it because of health issues with you or the baby. Your older child needs reinforcement of being wanted and needed by the family during this time.
- Determining whether your child should be present for the baby’s birth is a personal matter that only you can make. Some families find this to be a positive experience, but consider how your child may react if you have a difficult delivery and they witness you reacting to the pain of bringing their new sibling into the world.
- If you choose to have your child present during delivery, be sure to prepare them thoroughly beforehand by watching videos of births with them, bringing them to midwife or OB appointments, and talking them through the process.
- Have a separate adult caregiver present whose sole responsibility is to be there to watch and support your child during the delivery.
- If possible, give your child an age-appropriate job, such as cutting the umbilical cord or putting on the hat, to make them feel like an important member of the team.

Getting to Know You

- The first “introduction” of the two is very important. Let your older child pick out a present to give to the baby at this event, and have a special present there for your older child that is “from your baby sister/brother.”
- Before the child arrives in the room, place the baby in the bassinet and not in mommy’s or daddy’s arms. Let them set their own pace. Do they want to touch or hold the baby? Help them do that. If they want to exchange gifts first or just get their bearings, that’s fine, too.

When Company Calls

- This will be an especially hard time for them, because everyone wants to see and hold the new baby.
- Remind visitors to pay attention to your older child and not just the baby.
- Have some “big brother/sister” gifts to give your child as friends and relatives start showing up with baby gifts, so your older child won’t feel left out.

Settling In

- In the next few days and weeks, you will likely begin to see some acting out and regressive behavior. Although you want to make your child feel secure in the new family dynamic, it is best that you don’t allow them to “rule the roost.”
- Establish some one-on-one time each day when each parent spends their own alone time with the older sibling. It doesn’t have to be a large period of time. Even 10 minutes means a lot to a small child. Let the child set the agenda. They will feel more in control and begin to find their own way to acceptance.
- Help your child grieve over losing their place as the only child in the family. Really listen, acknowledge any negative feelings, and help them come up with positive ways to love and live with their new baby sibling that won’t leave them feeling left out. Never deny or discount what they are feeling.
- Make it very clear that there is to be absolutely no harming of others, especially the baby. Teach your child more constructive ways to express bad or angry feelings they may have toward the baby.
- Do not suddenly expect your child to become more independent when you have a new baby, as this will likely make them act just the opposite. “Baby” your child a little, if that’s what they seem to crave, to help stave off regression in less acceptable ways.
- Give your older child some private space and things of their own that they don’t have to share with the baby.
- Point out the benefits of being an older child, like choosing what to eat and wear, or what toys to play with, and having friends.
- Give them special jobs that they can do if they want to help with the baby’s care or household. Just don’t overdo it.

Although we have focused on young children as older siblings here, you can get a wealth of information on preparing children of all ages on the Internet, at your local library and bookstores, and through your local [Baby Product Experts](#) affiliated store where there are trained experts on helping families grow.

Baby Product Experts specialty stores provide safe, high-quality products and expert advice.