



Preparing for a New Sibling

Conratulations! We are so excited that you are welcoming a new baby into your home! Children benefit so much from growing up with a sibling. We have put together some information to help you prepare your child for coping with the many changes that come with having a new sibling:

Establishing routines:

- It is important to establish new routines that will be sustainable **before** the baby arrives. Your child is used to getting much more attention from you than will be feasible. If you wait until the baby arrives to make changes, this can lead to feelings of resentment. Therefore, we recommend making small lifestyle changes now **with no mention of the coming baby** so that your child does not relate any changes in routine to the arrival of his or her sibling.
- Allow your child opportunities to become increasingly independent. With a new baby in the house, you will be counting on your child to do more and more things for him or herself. Start building this into your day now.
- Give your child time to play by him or herself. There will be less time for you to constantly interact, so it is helpful to start letting your child work in a separate space while you prepare dinner, clean, read a book, etc.
- Find something special for each parent to do with just your older child(ren) that you can continue once the new baby arrives. You might read books, cook, sing, build puzzles, play instruments, draw a picture, take the dog for the walk, etc. Just make sure it is something you do **every day** that you can continue to make time for after the arrival of the baby. This way your child will know that just because they are sharing you with a new baby doesn't mean that they will never have special alone time.

Talking to your child about the new baby:

- Involve your child as much as possible in talking about the baby. Show them pictures of the ultrasound, let them be involved in preparing the nursery, read books about babies, and talk to your child about the upcoming changes.
- **DO NOT** apologize to your child about any changes that are happening. This sets your child up to resent you/the new baby and puts the changes in a negative light. Instead of saying "I'm sorry that I can't read you a book but I need to feed the baby," you might say "The baby is hungry right now. Would you like to read a book by yourself or wait until she is done eating?"
- Remember that children feed off of your emotions. If you feel anxious or sad, your child will feel and take on that stress. Emphasize the exciting parts of your changing family dynamic. Your child looks to you for emotional cues; if you can express how exciting this change is, he or she will have an easier transition.
- Many parents fall into the trap of talking to their child about how much they can help with the new baby. While most children will eventually want to take on a helpful role, expecting it from the beginning can be stressful and feel forced. Instead, model

caring for the baby with no expectation that your child wants to be involved. This way he or she can warm up on his or her own timeline. Many children who have watched their parents care for a newborn naturally want to be involved in feeding, holding, etc.

Life with multiple children:

- As with any major change, your child may have difficulty with the transition to a new family dynamic. Do not be surprised if your child reverts to more infantile behavior (toileting regressions, tantrums, whiny/clingy, etc.), as this is very normal. Often this is your child's way of trying to get some extra attention. Many times this behavior can be avoided by having consistent routines and ensuring that each child receives individual attention daily.
- Avoid falling into the habit of one parent taking care of each child. Oftentimes the father takes on a bigger role with the older child while the mother cares for the newborn. Though this is natural, be sure that **each parent** has one-on-one special time with **each child** every day.
- Your child is likely to test limits during this time. Stay patient and consistent.
- Avoid labelling your child as a "big kid" and comparing them to the new baby. This can lead to resentment. Remember that your child wants to know that he or she is still *your* baby, even though there is a new baby in the house. Keep discussions of age or of the new baby out of your conversations with your child (Instead of saying "You can put on your shoes by yourself because you're a big kid and your sister can't because she is just a baby," simply say "It's time to put on your shoes. Would you like to do it yourself or would you like me to help?").
- Many people make the mistake of thinking that their older child must share everything with the new baby. If the baby grabs something from the older child, parents often excuse this by saying "She's just a baby" and expecting their older child to understand and cope. Instead, we recommend teaching your children to take turns just as they do at school. Even though the baby will not understand, it is important to verbalize this to the new baby so that your child hears and recognizes that limits are consistent for both children regardless of age ("Your sister is working on that puzzle right now. Would you like to shake a rattle?"). Don't expect your child to share or work on something at the same time. This often happens spontaneously, but when forced leads to resentment. Instead, help your child protect his/her work from a curious new sibling. Likewise, don't allow your child to take something from the baby.
- This transition doesn't happen overnight, and there are many ups and downs. Often when a baby reaches certain milestones (crawling, grasping objects, walking, talking, etc.) we see a regression in the older child. This is partially because they have to come to terms with the new sibling being able to get into their things and the fact that the child will not always be a baby; there will soon be two (or three!) *children* in the house. Many times we prepare a child so well for a baby that we forget to prepare them for the fact that this baby will one day be a walking, talking toddler.

Remember that children are very adaptable and can handle much more than we give them credit for. Focus on the exciting times ahead and relax. Know that issues may arise, but they are short-lived and only a small piece of the exciting new changes ahead! We are always available to problem solve specific behaviors. Congratulations again!!!