

## What You Might Expect

You can expect your older child to feel unsure about the whole idea of a sibling, especially if your children are less than three years apart. Your toddler would have found his or her place in the family and be secure in that role. But, when a new baby comes along, they will often feel like their position is threatened.

Take a moment and try to imagine what your child might be feeling. From their point of view, most of the time and attention that they were so used to having is now being focused on the newborn. Your child's emotions during this confusing time can range from complete acceptance to outright hostility.

Young children will seldom tell how they feel. Instead, they show their feelings by their actions. A preverbal toddler may show physical aggression toward the baby, while an older child may regress in his behaviors, such as wetting himself or talking baby talk. Expect your child to release his feelings in some way if he is feeling displaced. When you sense this change in your child, take some time out with them or involve them in caring for the newborn in a way they can feel helpful.

## Prepare Sister or Brother for Baby

Bringing home a new baby can be both a joyful time and a challenging time. Preparing your older child for the arrival beforehand can make the changes easier and less stressful for the entire family. Ask them what they would think about having a new baby in their house and **listen to their answers**. Don't try and change their minds if they express negative feelings, instead **listen** to their little hearts explain why they would or would not want a new baby. Share with them why you think a new baby would be good for your family. Other ways to help your child become excited about a new baby is to involve them in the process.

- Let them help choose items for the baby.
- Talk to your baby and invite big brother/sister to talk to baby as well.
- Let him hear the new baby's heartbeat or see the baby on ultrasound.
- Let him feel the baby kick. Invite him to pray over his baby brother or sister.
- Look at children's books about childbirth, babies, and fetal development.
- Spend time together looking through photographs of your child when he was a baby.
- Talk with your child about where you will have the baby and where he will be during the birth.
- If you are planning on a room change for your older child, make sure to move him months before the baby's arrival.

## Things Children Need to Know about Babies

Answering a few questions about the baby will help your child understand more why your time and energies are focused on the newborn. Also, if these questions are asked often or in anger, try to take some time with your child or help them be involved in the activities, as this may be a sign of feeling displaced.

— **Why babies cry so much:** Babies cry for many reasons. Sometimes they cry a lot. Explain to your child what they might be trying to let us know by crying. Babies usually cry because they are hungry, need a diaper change,

or they are tired, cold, or something hurts.

— **Why babies have to eat so many times:** Explain how tiny their tummies are and how quickly the milk they drink gets used up. Show him how small a few ounces are by pouring some milk in a cup and letting him see it.

— **Why new babies have to sleep so much:** Explain how hard it is to grow big when you start out so small and that makes babies very tired.

— **Why new babies need to be held so much:** Let them know how long the baby was held inside of you while she grew and how she always felt warm and safe. Explain to him how much the baby misses that feeling.

— **How he can help take care of the baby:** Getting a clean diaper for the baby when you need to change him or being extra quiet while the baby is sleeping are good ways to help. You can tell him it is his job to help protect the baby by picking up his toys and keeping the toilet lid closed. Explain to him that most of the baby care has to be done by a grownup and about the things he is not supposed to help with, like feeding the baby or picking her up when she cries.

## When the Baby Comes Home

During these hectic and sleep-deprived days, you can easily fall into a routine of just getting through the day. But, it is extra important that you save some of your energy for your older child. While the new baby sleeps, instead of trying to get housework done, take a break with your older child. This is a great time to talk and cuddle or look at old pictures together. Tell him stories about himself and his first year of life.

Ask family and friends to help give special attention to your older child. A trip to the park with Dad or a walk with Grandma can really help your child feel special.

Include your older child while you are caring for the baby. While you are feeding the baby, read to your older child or cuddle him, too. This is also a great time to sing or just talk. Both your babies will benefit from this time.

Love him and praise him often. When he is helpful or gentle with the baby, praise him. Encourage him to learn how to make the baby smile and how to play with the baby.

## Prepare for Sibling Conflicts

Even if you introduce the new baby in a way that would encourage them to be friends, siblings will still grow up and argue and bicker and fight. Most of these conflicts are about each of your children trying to find his place, in the family and in the world. Parents must be wise as to how they respond to reduce their children's bickering and arguments. Set consequences for actions and **stick to them consistently**. Don't parent **over your child's head**. Work on being **creatively involved** and give your children feedback and consequences.

### Resources

1. William Sears, M.D., and Martha Sears, R.N., *The Baby Book, Revised Edition: Everything You Need to Know About Your Baby from Birth to Age Two*, January 8, 2013, unabridged. Location 1551.
2. Adapted from *Creative Correction* by Lisa Whelchel, a *Focus on the Family* book published by Tyndale House Publishers. Copyright © 2000, Lisa Whelchel.