

## **Preparing Kids**

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 meeting the newborn's basic needs.

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.

## **During Pregnancy**

There's not one right time or perfect way to tell a child about an impending sibling. When discussing the pregnancy, consider your own comfort level and your child's maturity level. Preschoolers, for example, may not grasp concepts of time, so it might not mean much if you say that the baby will arrive in a few months. It may be more useful to explain that the baby will arrive in a particular season, such as winter or when it's cold outside.

How much detail should you provide? Let your child's questions be your guide. For example, a 4-year-old child may ask: "Where do babies come from?" Despite how it sounds, the child isn't asking you to explain sex but probably wants to know where, literally, they come from. It may be enough to explain: "The baby comes from the uterus, which is inside the mother's belly." A child who wants to know more will ask.

If your child shows more interest in the baby, these activities can encourage that:

- going through your child's baby pictures
- reading books about childbirth (make sure they're developmentally appropriate)
- visiting friends who have infants
- packing a bag for the hospital
- thinking of potential baby names
- going to the doctor to hear the baby's heartbeat

Also look into sibling birth classes, which many hospitals offer to provide orientation for soon-to-be brothers and sisters. These classes can include lessons on how to hold a baby, explanations of how a baby is born, and opportunities for kids to discuss their feelings about having a new brother or sister.

## **Planning for Childbirth**

As your due date draws near, make arrangements for older kids for the time when you're in the hospital. Discuss these plans so kids know what to expect when the day arrives.

Consider letting your child visit you in the hospital as soon as possible after the baby is born, ideally when no other visitors are around — this helps reinforce the birth as an intimate family event.

Try to keep routines as regular as possible in the days and weeks around the baby's arrival. If you plan to make any room shifts to accommodate the baby, do it a few weeks before your due date. If older kids are approaching a major milestone, like potty training or moving from a crib to a bed, try to make those changes well before your due date or put them off until after the baby has been home for a while.

## **Bringing the New Baby Home**

Once the baby is home, you can help your other kids adjust to the changes. Include them as much as possible in the daily activities involving the baby so that they don't feel left out.

Many kids want to help take care of a new baby. Though that "help" may mean that each task takes longer, it can give an older child a chance to interact with the baby in a positive way. Depending on their age, a big brother or sister may want to fold or fetch diapers, help push the carriage, talk to the baby, or help dress, bathe, or burp the baby.

If your child expresses no interest in the baby, don't be alarmed and don't force it. It can take time.

Some occasions, like breastfeeding, excludes older kids. For these times, try to have toys on hand so that you can feed the baby without being interrupted or worrying about an older child feeling left out.

Try to take advantage of opportunities for one-on-one time with older kids. Spend time together while the baby is sleeping and, if possible, set aside time each day for older kids to get one parent's

undivided attention. Knowing that there's special time exclusively for them may help reduce any resentment or anger about the new baby.

Also remind relatives and friends that your older child might want to talk about something other than the new baby.

## **Dealing With Feelings**

With all of the changes that a new baby can bring, some older kids might struggle as they try to adjust.

Encourage older kids to talk about their feelings about the new baby. If a child cannot articulate those feelings, don't be surprised if he or she tests limits or reverts to speaking in baby talk.

If your child acts up, don't bend the rules, but understand what feelings may be motivating that behavior. It could be a sign that your child needs more one-on-one time with you, but make it clear that although his or her feelings are important, they have to be expressed in appropriate ways.