

# Helping your child adapt to a new baby

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## Preparing for the New Baby

- Follow your child's lead. When they want to talk about the baby, take advantage of that, but as soon as their attention shifts elsewhere, let it go. Don't push the topic.
- Read books about babies and birth. Here's some to try – most are aimed at 3 – 6 year olds.
  - Mama's Belly by Kate Hosford
  - Hello Baby by Lizzy Rockwell
  - I'm a Big Brother / Sister by Joanna Cole
  - Tenemos un bebe / We Have a Baby by Cathryn Falwell
  - How to Welcome a New Baby by Jean Reagan. Good for 2 – 4 year olds.
  - Waiting for Baby and My New Baby by Rachel Fuller. Good for 1 – 4 year olds.
- Take a sibling preparation class. (They may be offered at local hospitals.)
- Tell stories to your older child about when *they* were a baby. Look at baby pictures together.
- Provide dolls and doll toys for your toddler to "practice" baby care activities.
- If there are any behavior issues or any family routines that won't work after baby comes, try to change them at least 3 – 4 months before the birth.
- If one parent provides most of the care for your child, increase the amount of time they receive care from other people so they know they have other adults to rely on if that parent is busy.

## In the early weeks with the new baby

- Try not to change day-to-day routines. Your child will need consistency and reliability.
- The safety of the baby is vital, so set clear limits to protect the baby.
- Have some time of each day where the older child knows they are your top priority.
- Let your older child continue to be a "baby" when they need to. Don't expect instant maturity.
  - Regression is common (like a child who was potty trained having accidents.) Listen to your child's feelings and validate that adjusting to a new baby is hard for everyone.
- Make sure your older child has some space and things that belong only to them.
- Expect to have good days and bad days. Don't worry that it will "never get better." It will!
- Don't blame things on the baby: Instead of saying "I can't play with you because of the baby", try saying "I really want to play with you – as soon as baby is done nursing, you and I will have play time. Or, you can bring your toys here right now."
- Have 'special times' with your older child: a quick trip to the park, a bedtime story, an outing.
- Give the older child special responsibilities. Making the older child a "helper" in the care of the new baby will help the child feel involved instead of neglected. However, it is important to remember taking care of the new baby is not your older child's responsibility.
- Encourage and reinforce the positive behaviors you want to see in your older child.
- Sometimes, parents feel guilty that they can no longer give the older child the same attention that they used to. It may help to remind yourself that although this doesn't seem "fair" in the moment, over time, they will gain benefits from the experience of having a younger sibling.

## **RESOURCES**

Helping children adjust to the new baby – tips and lots of recommendations for children's books about new babies: <https://www.mottchildren.org/posts/your-child/new-baby-sibling>  
<https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/sibling-prep.html>

A video I made that you can show an older child to help them learn about ways that newborns communicate their needs: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RiV\\_uXOg6Bg&t=538s&pp=ygUMbmV3Ym9ybiBjdWVz](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RiV_uXOg6Bg&t=538s&pp=ygUMbmV3Ym9ybiBjdWVz)