

Helping Your Older Child Adjust

What do I need to know about adding a new baby into our family?

Sibling rivalry usually starts right after, (or even before) the arrival of the second child. The older child often becomes aggressive, “acts out” or even *regresses*. *Regression* means acting more like a baby. It’s important to prepare your older child when you know you are expecting a new baby. Kids need to know what to expect, and they need time to adjust.

How can I prepare my child ahead of time for their new baby sibling?

- Tell your child about your pregnancy. Your child needs to hear about it from you, not from someone else.
- If you plan to move your child to a new bed and/or bedroom, do so well before the baby arrives, so your older child doesn’t feel displaced by the baby.
- Give them a realistic idea of what to expect when the baby first arrives. You will be tired, and the baby will take lots of your time. The baby will not be able to do much at first, except eat, sleep, poop, pee and cry. The baby will not be a playmate.
- Have your child practice holding a doll and supporting the head. Teach them how to touch and hold a baby very gently.
- Let them participate in preparations in any way possible.

How can I help my child adjust to the new baby once it’s here?

- Set aside special time for your older child.
- Listen to how your child feels about the baby and the changes in your family. If they express negative feelings, acknowledge them. Help your child put their feelings into words. Never deny or discount your child’s feelings.
- Make sure it is very clear that absolutely no hurting is allowed.
- “Baby” your child, if that’s what they seem to crave. There is a tendency to suddenly expect your child to become more independent when you have a new baby.
- Make sure the older child has some special, private space, and things of their own that they don’t have to share with the baby.
- Let them participate in the baby’s care.