



Helping Kids Adjust to a New Sibling

The arrival of a new baby brings many changes to a family. While exciting, these changes can be difficult for older siblings to handle—it is common for them to feel jealous and react by acting out. There are a few things parents can do to help prepare older siblings for their new role.

1. During pregnancy, tell the older child about the baby. Consider the age/maturity level when discussing the arrival of the baby and be prepared to answer questions (i.e. “Where do babies come from?”). It could be as simple as stating “The baby is growing inside mommy’s belly and will be here in the summertime!”
2. Going through baby pictures, reading books about childbirth (age appropriate), thinking of baby names, packing a hospital bag, and visiting friends who have babies are some things you can do to help support and answer any other questions your child may have.
3. Make arrangements and discuss your plans for the day of baby’s arrival.
4. Once baby is home, include the older sibling as much as possible in daily activities (i.e. helping with diaper changes, pushing the stroller, talking and playing with baby, etc.). Note: if they do not express interest in the baby, don’t be alarmed and don’t force it—it takes time.
5. Encourage the older sibling to talk about their feelings regarding the new baby but understand that it may be hard for them to express these emotions. Acting up, reverting to baby talk, and other behavioral upsets may occur. It is not easy, but be patient and remind your child that their feelings are valid but must be expressed in appropriate ways.
6. If/when your older child responds with physical aggression, respond calmly and with as little alarm as possible. If a hug is a little too tight, or hitting occurs, you can approach by saying “I cannot let you hit the baby” or “I cannot let you hug the baby that hard, let me help you”—helping, collaborating, and offering gentle reminders of kindness.
7. Creating a baby-free-zone for your older child can help create a space where nothing is off limits and safe, uninterrupted play can occur. Bedrooms work great for this.
8. Carve out one-on-one time with your older child. Take a walk, read books together, play a game, even keeping the same bedtime routine can provide positive, connected time.

Every child will have an adjustment period and it is normal, expected, and healthy for them to struggle a little bit. Stick with routine, continued conversation, and lots of love to help navigate this time.