



Handling New Siblings

A new baby in a family affects all family members. Older siblings, in particular, go through a period of adjustment in their new roles as older brothers or sisters. Consider the following suggestions to help siblings feel more involved and secure during this period of transition.

- Consider involving your children in prenatal visits as appropriate (e.g., meeting your obstetrician or midwife, looking at the ultrasound). Use children's books to explain basic facts about conception, pregnancy, and birth.
- Discuss with your children what will happen when you go to the hospital for the birth. If you are adopting, talk to your children in advance about adoption and the adoption process.
- Consider visiting the hospital with your children.
- Let your children know who will take care of them when you are in the hospital or when you go to bring your adopted baby home.
- Include your children in planning for the baby's homecoming. Consider helping your children pick out a new gift for the baby, involving them in decorating the baby's room, and taking them with you while shopping for the new baby. While you are involving them in preparing for the new baby, think about ways to make them feel special, such as selecting a gift to give them when the baby comes home, asking them if they would like to make changes to their own bedroom space, and so forth.
- Discuss the long-term advantages of being a big sister or big brother, such as being looked up to by a younger sibling and having a playmate.
- When the baby comes home, expect that your children will return to some behaviors you thought they had outgrown (e.g., experiencing setbacks in toilet learning, using baby talk, wanting a pacifier). Anticipate that they will retest rules to see if they still apply. Assure them of your love. Keep their routines as consistent and predictable as possible. Continue to have consistent expectations for behavior.
- Praise any positive attention siblings give to the new baby.
- Provide siblings with a doll or stuffed animal that they can hold while you nurture the baby. Involve them in age-appropriate baby care.
- Assure your older children that they are still important to you. You can reinforce this by spending private time with them each day while the baby sleeps or while someone else cares for the baby.

- Allow older children to express their feelings about the baby and about changes in the family.

Cite as: Dixon S. 2002. Helping siblings adjust to the new baby. In Jellinek M, Patel BP, Froehle MC, eds., Bright Futures in Practice: Mental Health—Volume II, Tool Kit. Arlington, VA: National Center for Education in Maternal and Child Health.