

# Preparing for a new sibling

A new baby will change the life of everyone in the family - but at least you know what to expect! Learning to love a new arrival, while sharing the previously exclusive attention of mum and dad, is a big ask for a small person. Here are a few tips to smooth the way in an expanding family.

## Think carefully about when you share the news

Nine months is a long time in a small child's life. Point out other pregnant women and introduce them to newborns so they'll get a gradual idea of what to expect.

## Plan

Have routines already established so that your older child/children feel secure in the predictability of each day.

## Be firm

We have a tendency to 'soften' our approach to our first child, in the hope that this will prevent him having any negative feelings about the baby. Unfortunately, this permission to be less self-controlled can leave our child feeling insecure and more inclined to dislike the new person in the family. If you want your child to have a good relationship with his new sibling, be consistently firm. Do not tolerate meanness, grabbing toys off the baby or any roughness.

## Keep a focus on the older child

When it is time to feed the baby let the older sibling know that it is time for a book, a song or to get out the special puzzles. Some families have a very special box that only comes out when it is feeding time. These toys and activities are exclusive to this time. Before you start a feed, set up the environment so that your older child can be near you, playing with her toys and interacting gently with you. Be available to talk, invent a story or even sing!

Have some 'mummy dates' and 'daddy dates' where you plan to do something a little bit special with your older children on their own.

Time other major changes such as the move into a big kid's bed, toilet training or beginning preschool, for well before the baby's arrival, or several months down the track when new routines have been established.

See your child as a little person - not as a big person. Next to your baby they may look enormous, but try not to put enormous expectations on them.

## Involve them as helpers and acknowledge how much you appreciate what they can do

When people admire the baby (which of course is natural) - also include comments on how wonderful it is for your baby to have a big brother or sister and how lucky the baby is! Use a baby sling or backpack when both children need your attention.

Acknowledge your child's feelings while putting a boundary around their behaviour. "It is okay to feel jealous of Matthew. You may not hit him ever." Offer your older children options to solve problems and make choices. "James, while I feed the baby, would you like to play with daddy or sit by me and read your book to the baby?" "Which outfit would you like to see your baby sister in today?"

## Assure and reassure your child that no one could ever take their place

"You are my one and only Lucy. No one could ever replace my Lucy."

Encourage feelings of closeness and pride. Tell your older child how much the baby loves him and is looking forward to playing with him when he can walk and talk. When the baby smiles at him, tell him how special baby thinks he is.

## Keep expectations realistic

Sometimes an older child wants to regress and play baby for a while. Be playful and accepting.

"This is my other baby Sam. He almost fits into the bassinet. Yes he has got teeth and a lot of hair - more than most babies. Yes, he is quite heavy. He weighs 15kg already and he even eats sandwiches." Keep a twinkle in your eye and your older child will love it. Parents are sometimes surprised at this behaviour and insist that the child must grow up. A little regression often helps a child transition towards acceptance and independence.

## Allow your older child to protect his special toys and select the ones he wants to put away safely, and the ones he will share

Instead of scolding your child for leaving his toys around, or reminding him that a baby doesn't know not to touch, give him a special box that his special toys go into. This box could be labelled 'Big Boy's Toys' and be decorated with bright stickers. A special shelf or place can be designated for the toy box to go on.

Learning to share mum and dad can be a big ask for a small person.



## Try this

- There's no magical formula as to the right time to tell your child that a new baby is on the way. Most preschoolers have a limited concept of time and won't really understand that there will be a significant wait before the baby makes its entrance.
- The best way to prepare for a change to the family routine is to firmly establish existing ones - that will help older siblings feel more secure.
- Let your older child know how important and loved they are. Involve them in preparing for the baby's arrival and give them small jobs to do helping caring for the baby. Make sure they get special time with mum and dad on their own.

At The Parenting Place we believe **'family is everything'** so we've created a series of 45 Hot Tips brochures to help you make the most of your parenting journey. They're grouped into four categories - Early Years, Middle Years, Tweens and Teens, and General Parenting.

### Early Years topics include -

- Baby-proofing your relationship
- Entertaining baby
- Fussy eaters
- Getting ready for school
- Getting ready for toilet training
- Raising a resilient child
- Me time for mum
- Preparing for a new sibling
- Sharing
- Tantrum taming
- Understanding behaviour
- Why won't she stop crying