



American College of Pediatricians

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Patient Information Handout

HELPING YOUR CHILD BECOME A BIG BROTHER OR SISTER

Congratulations! As you look forward to the birth of your baby, you are probably experiencing various emotions including excitement and anticipation as you look forward to meeting your new infant, anxiety over how you will be able to meet the needs of both your children, and worry about how your older child will respond to the new baby. We hope this information will help all of you enjoy this new adventure.

Please remember that any change within the family can cause some degree of unrest in children who have enjoyed comfortable routine and loving attention. A new baby can add to the unrest as the older child may feel he is no longer as important and that his world is out of control. Expect that your firstborn may “regress” and show some behaviors normally seen in younger children during the early times of adjustment. Please don’t push your child to try any new “grown up” behaviors, such as toilet learning, when she is adjusting to a new baby at home.

Before the new baby arrives

1. If your child asks “why?” you are having a new baby don’t try to find a reason. Just explain that a new baby is a gift who will bring more love into the family. Allow your child to make many small decisions every day so she still feels some sense of control in her life. Let her choose her clothing, her food (among a selection of healthy choices!), books to read and any other things that are *reasonable*.
2. Use “emotion” words with your child so he becomes used to hearing and using words like “excited”, “disappointed”, and “sad”. This will help him learn to use words to express his emotions rather than actions.
3. Allow your child to have “mixed-up” emotions about the new baby and don’t assume what emotions she is experiencing – ask. She does not have to be excited ALL the time. Let her know that it is acceptable to express her disappointment that a new baby is coming (or has arrived).
4. Choose some small gifts and wrap them so you will have them available for your older child to give to the baby.
5. Choose one nice gift for the baby to bring home from the hospital to the big brother or big sister. (Someone who brings me a gift can’t be all bad!)
6. Avoid sudden changes in sleeping arrangements when your baby comes home. **MAKE CERTAIN** that your older child is sleeping NOW in the same place he will be sleeping when the new baby comes home. Make any changes a few months before the baby’s expected birth or a few months after the birth
7. Let your child help you make choices for the new baby. Maybe she can select the color of the new blanket, a new toy for the baby, or decide where the crib will be placed.
8. Let your child play with a doll and learn how to hold a baby properly. You can also teach him what “gentle” means – soft, slow, and quiet.
9. Read books about becoming a big brother or big sister. There are also lovely books which show the unborn baby’s development that children can enjoy. You can also show your child his own baby pictures.

10. Set aside a special place – a box, a drawer, a cupboard – for the toys that your older child will not have to share. This is also a great way to keep small toys away from the younger infant.
11. Consider allowing your child come with you to your medical appointments. Some hospitals have a sibling preparation class which may be helpful.
12. You may want to record yourself reading some bedtime stories so your child can listen to them while you are in the hospital.

While Mom is in the hospital

1. Try to keep your older child's daily routine the same.
2. When your child comes to visit in the hospital, greet her without the newborn in your arms.
3. If possible, do let your older child come to the hospital to visit and hold the new baby. Consider giving a gift to your older child from the new baby.
4. Ask your older child to take care of something at home while mom is in the hospital – watering a plant or caring for a pet will make him feel responsible.

After you come home

1. DO let your child hold the baby. You can help him sit in a chair or couch so that the baby will be safe.
2. Allow your older child to help in the care of the new baby. He can bring the diapers, put on lotion, and occasionally choose the outfit for the baby to wear.
3. Plan ahead. When you will be occupied with the new baby (feeding, bathing, etc.) and unavailable to hold the older sibling, explain that you will be busy with the baby and that you will attend to the older child when you are finished. Explain that when he was a baby you gave him the time he needed and now it is the baby's turn. These are opportunities to teach patience and sharing.
4. When both children need you at the same time, you may need to prioritize. When possible, choose to take care of the older child first. She needs to know that you are still there to take care of her. When it is necessary to help the baby first, say out loud "wait a minute, I'm with your brother" and then take care of the baby after a few seconds have passed. This can be an opportunity for the older sibling to learn patience.
5. Talk to your baby about how wonderful the big brother or big sister is. "Your big brother can ride a tricycle. He will teach you how when you are older."
6. Interpret the baby's behavior in a positive light for the older child. "See how your baby enjoys holding your hand. She likes you."
7. Let your child hear you using emotion words. "I am disappointed I can't take you to the park right now."
8. Take pictures of each of your children – separately – and together.
9. Arrange your day so you can spend some time alone with your older child. Give him extra hugs and kisses.

For additional information see [Welcoming Your Second Baby](https://www.amazon.com/Welcoming-Your-Second-Vicki-Lansky/dp/193186344X/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1467385404&sr=1-1&keywords=welcoming+your+second+baby) by Vicki Lansky, https://www.amazon.com/Welcoming-Your-Second-Vicki-Lansky/dp/193186344X/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1467385404&sr=1-1&keywords=welcoming+your+second+baby.