



So you want to know more about...

Siblings

Welcome, baby!

Most parents are pleasantly surprised by the amount of genuine affection older siblings have for their newborn brothers or sisters. Is this cozy scenario too good to be true? No, but it's not the whole picture. All children struggle with anxiety about being replaced, and about changes to their world as they know it. They keep these feelings under wraps in the beginning, because they know everyone wants them to be a good big brother or sister. How can you help your child work through those concerns as you *all* adjust to this new arrangement?

First, help him **verbalize** his feelings about the baby. Don't ask him to *explain*, he can't. But when you hear impatient sighs, see a downcast face, or notice sulking, say what he might be thinking:

- "It's frustrating to have to wait so long, isn't it?"
- "It seems like she will never stop crying, doesn't it!"
- "I bet you can't wait until she goes to bed and we can have some alone time!"

In a sense, you'll be letting off steam for him. With time, he'll take your cue and may even say some downright "unloving" things on his own. Remember, it's just steam. And it's healthier to get feelings **out in the open**.

Here are some other ways you can make welcoming baby a concrete and meaningful experience for your older child:

- **Gradually move baby equipment** into the house so it will be less overwhelming.
- **Start a calendar countdown** to when baby MIGHT arrive

during your last month or two. Any time longer is too hard for children to conceptualize.

- Buy a **baby doll** and practice caring for it in the months before the birth.
- Have your child help make the **birth announcements**.
- Include him in the **newborn baby care**. Invite him into the cozy fold by having him fetch diapers or blankets, sing lullabies, and sit and rock baby to sleep with you.
- **"Translate"** your infant's gazes, coos, and happy kicking feet for your older child. Babies love to watch big brothers and sisters who love to show off for them.
- Sign up for a New **Sibling Class** at your birthing center.

Big Kid Beds

If your older child sleeps in your bed or the crib you'll need, you'll want to start the transition to a big kid bed long before it becomes a necessity. Getting kicked out of mom and dad's cozy bed to make room for a nursing newborn is the ultimate rejection. If this transition happens long beforehand, your older child may still hop in bed with you from time to time, but she won't have an emotional attachment to sleeping together in the same way. Don't emphasize the baby as you make the change. Talk about the fact *she's* getting bigger and you all need more space. It also helps to have children help pick out their bed and bedding. Start by doing naps in the new location and once that works, move to nights. Don't forget a child-safe nightlight and side rails!

Further reading

- *Julius, Baby of the World*, by Kevin Henkes
- *Geraldine's Baby Brother*, by Holly Keller
- *Noisy Nora*, by Rosemary Wells

Sibling Rivalry

One might assume the older child in a family will always dominate the younger one, but it's not always the case. Personality is a big factor. Some children are more agreeable than others, and some children prefer to always be "in charge."

If your children are less than two years apart, rivalry won't be as big an issue until they get older. They'll still compete for attention and toys, but they won't have the cognitive and emotional adjustments to make that children ages 3 years and up do.

How can you promote reasonable relations between siblings with a bigger age gap? Help your older child understand physical limits of play, and don't allow your younger child to hurt the older one just because she doesn't "know any better."

Once your youngest child is mobile and fairly verbal, let your kids handle their own squabbles. If you rush to solve the problem every time they raise their voices, you will be taking on that job for life. Give them five minutes to work on the problem. If screaming escalates or they are getting physical, separate them. But don't let their squabbles become their surefire way of engaging your attention.

The old wives' tale says, "I don't want to hear about it unless someone's bleeding." It sounds harsh, but the truth of the matter is that kids can work out most of their difficulties on their own. Followers need leaders and leaders need followers. It's up to them to decide who gets which job.

Taking Care of Parents

With all its rewards, becoming a second-time parent can be rough in the beginning because you don't have the "reserves" you enjoyed with your first baby. It's important to take care of yourselves. Try:

- Alternating nighttime duties if feasible.
- Establishing a more firm bedtime ritual and earlier bedtime if you've been lax with your older child in the past. The few hours you have between the kids' bedtime and your own is important downtime for both parents.
- Eating take-out or convenience food more frequently during the first few months. If you're so inclined, freeze your own dinners ahead of time. Dinner is a lot of work and comes at the point in the day when everyone is tired.
- Recruiting relatives and babysitters to watch your infant or give your older child one-on-one time.
- Saying yes to short outings without baby. An hour or two of grown-up time will really help you recharge and feel like a human being again.
- Exercising to relieve stress and gain energy.

Frequently Asked Questions

I feel so emotional all the time. It's all I can do to drag myself out of bed. I wasn't like this with my first child! Your energy is divided now between two kids. Check with your practitioner to see if you have a vitamin deficiency. Make sure you take naps if you're up a lot at night. Feeling emotional is normal, but if you feel particularly blue without relief, it may be post-partum depression. Talk to a professional.

I'm feeling a lot of pressure to get my 2 year- old potty trained before his sibling arrives. Any suggestions? If you're seeing signs of readiness, go ahead and encourage his attempts. But don't put a timeline on it. He'll start the process when he's ready,

and you don't want training to become a power struggle.

My older child is acting like such a baby. She's 4 years old and has started wetting the bed, talking baby talk, and refusing to cooperate. I'm at my wits end! She is, too. Regression is very typical behavior with such a major family event. Don't make a big deal of it, or it may become a means of *ensuring* attention. Handle things the way you did before the baby was born, and don't lower your long-term expectations. Regression is a symptom of adjustment challenges and passes quickly.