



Series #5: Supporting Families

Tips for Tots



Tip #1: Supporting Your Child with a New Sibling

Strategies

Did you know?

The addition of a new baby to the family is a joyous experience for many families. This can also be a big adjustment for the family, especially young children causing a good deal of stress. It may be the first time your child has to share his/her parents. His or her role in the family has also changed. Depending on your child's age, temperament, and development, your child's level of distress related to this change will vary. At first, your child may be excited about the new baby. As they realize the baby requires much of your time and attention, you may notice them struggling. During this transition, you may see some changes in your child's behavior, such as clinginess, acting out- directing anger toward the baby or you, acting younger than their age, or even becoming withdrawn. Preparing yourself for some possible challenges will aid in supporting your child through this process. Letting your child know what to expect and providing support around their feelings and their new role will help with their adjustment.

- Waiting several months for a new sibling can seem like a long time. Taking your child with you to a check up, so they may hear the baby's heartbeat or see a picture of the baby can help the process feel more real and keep your child involved.
- Include your child in the planning and decision making. Include your child in picking the décor for the baby's room, picking out baby items and give them choices about any clothes or toys.
- Many hospitals have programs available for siblings. Take your child with you to visit the hospital and let them know who will take care of them while you are there.
- Be honest about what it will be like when the baby gets home. Your child will benefit from knowing that the baby may sleep a lot, may cry often and will need to be fed and changed frequently.
- Allow your child to be a helper. Include your child in caring for the baby by giving your child developmentally appropriate tasks (i.e. handing you a diaper during diaper changes). Respect your child's decision if he/she does not want to help.
- Read stories about your child's new role. Parents can use this to talk to their child about what they are experiencing.
- Spend time together. As little as 10 minutes of special time together engaging in an activity of your child's interest, can improve your child's cooperativeness and make a huge difference in how your child feels and behaves.
- Validate and acknowledge your child's feelings. This is a difficult time for your child; they now have to share you with a new baby who is demanding so much of your attention.
- If your child is being rough with the baby, show your child how to be gentle. Provide praise for positive interactions.
- Your child may be feeling less secure; keeping their routine consistent and predictable will help them feel safer and more confident. Avoid blaming the baby for any changes in routine.
- If your child wants you to nurture them like an infant, go with this, it will be a temporary period and you will find that doing this may help reduce more unwanted regression.
- As well wishers visit the baby and offer gifts, have a special "big brother/big sister" gift for your child so they do not feel left out.
- Point out the benefits of being older and comment on skills and privileges your child has, that the baby does not.

Resources:

<http://www.babycenter.com>

The Emotional Life of the Toddler, Alicia Lieberman, Ph.D
 Vera's Baby Sister- Vera Rosenberry
 Babies Don't Eat Pizza-Dianne Danzig

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