

# Helping your child adapt to a new baby

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## Preparing for the New Baby

- Follow your child's lead. When he wants to talk about the baby, take advantage of that, but as soon as his attention shifts elsewhere, let it go. Don't push the topic.
- Read books about babies and birth. Here's some to try:
  - We Have a Baby, by Cathryn Falwel
  - Berenstain Bears, Baby Makes Five by Stan Berenstain
  - How You Were Born by Margaret Miller
  - I'm a New Big Brother - Little Steps for Big Kids by Nora Gaydos
  - What Baby Needs by William and Martha Sears
  - Waiting for Baby and My New Baby by Rachel Fuller
- Take a sibling preparation class. Learn more at [www.greatstarts.org](http://www.greatstarts.org)
- Tell stories to your older child about when she was a baby. Look at her baby pictures together.
- Provide dolls and doll toys for your toddler to "practice" baby care behaviors he'll soon see.
- If there are any behavior or routines that won't work after baby comes, try to change them at least 3 – 4 months before the birth.
- If one parent provides almost all the care for your child, try to increase the amount of time she receives care from other providers so she knows she has other adults she can rely on.

## In the early weeks with the new baby

- Try not to change day-to-day routines. Your child will need consistency and reliability.
- The safety of the baby is top priority, so set clear limits to protect the baby.
- Have some time of each day where the older child knows they are your top priority.
- Let your older child continue to be a "baby" when he needs to be. Don't expect instant maturity and independence.
  - Regression is common – listen to your older child's feelings and validate that it's hard for everyone to adjust to the new baby.
- Make sure your older child has some space and things that belong only to them.
- Expect to have good days and bad days. Don't worry that it will "never get better."
- Don't blame things on the baby: Instead of saying "I can't play with you because of the baby", try saying "I really want to play with you – in just a few minutes baby will be done nursing, you and I will have play time. Or, you can bring your toys here right now."
- Have 'special times' with your older child: a quick trip to the park, a bedtime story, a outing.
- Give the older child special responsibilities. Making the older child a "helper" in the care of the new baby will help the child feel involved instead of neglected. However, it is important to remember that the new baby is not your older child's responsibility.
- Encourage and reinforce the positive behaviors you want to see in your older child.
- Sometimes, parents feel guilty that they can no longer give the older child the same attention that they used to. It may help to remind yourself that although this doesn't seem "fair" to your older child, they are also benefitting from the experience of having a younger sibling.

## **RESOURCES**

- Handout: <http://www.pantley.com/files/FirstBornJealousy.pdf>
- Helping children adjust to the new baby – tips and lots of recommendations for children's books about new babies: [www.med.umich.edu/yourchild/topics/newbaby.htm](http://www.med.umich.edu/yourchild/topics/newbaby.htm)
- [http://kidshealth.org/parent/positive/family/second\\_child.html](http://kidshealth.org/parent/positive/family/second_child.html)
- A video you can show an older child to help them learn about ways that newborns communicate their needs: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eiYANQY5NxM>