

New experiences: a sibling



Advice for parents on preparing their child for the arrival of a new brother or sister and supporting them through the change to family life. By **Annette Rawstrone**



While the anticipated arrival of a new baby is often exciting for all the family, it can also be a time of worrying change for children. This can be heightened if they have not experienced becoming a big brother or sister before. But don't worry, you can ease the transition by carefully preparing your child for the birth of their sibling and then planning how best to continue supporting them afterwards.

HOW TO PREPARE
It's important to speak to your child about getting a new brother and sister so that they are ready for the

change. It often helps to read storybooks on the subject, discuss what is happening and how the characters are feeling. Try to answer any questions in an honest and age-appropriate way.

Make your child feel included by showing them baby scans and letting them help to get things ready for the baby. Encourage them to join in the excitement of feeling the baby kick, or talking to the bump. Also, reassure them about how they were equally anticipated

and loved by showing them their baby photos. This can help them to remember that they also had special care and attention, while encouraging them to focus on what the newborn baby's needs may be, such as frequent feeding and nappy changes.

Ask your child how they would like to help when the baby is born and stress the importance of their role as big brother or sister. Your child may show an interest in playing with dolls and you could join in with their play – provide a bath to



wash the baby, nappies, Babygros and a comfy chair in which to bottle or 'breastfeed'.

Plan for any big adjustments to routines such as sleeping arrangements and do them a few months before or after the birth so that your child does not experience lots of upheaval at the same time.

Don't forget to prepare your child for what will happen when you or your partner go into labour – explain to them who will be looking after them and where they will be sleeping. Perhaps they could pack an overnight bag while you prepare your hospital bag?

HOW YOUR CHILD MAY REACT

Having a new baby in the household is a huge adjustment for everyone in the family, not just a child. It's important to remember their feelings and emotions in the run-up to the birth and once the baby has arrived.

Reactions can differ depending on the child's age and their position in the family, but they commonly include:

- Worrying about how the new baby will affect them and their place within the family, which may lead to them becoming easily upset, clingy or more demanding.
- Mixed emotions may be conveyed by regressing to 'babyish' behaviour themselves such as tantrums, sleepless nights and wetting themselves despite being toilet-trained.
- Feelings of

jealousy or resentment towards the new baby, which can start before it is born. This may be shown by being aggressive toward the 'bump' or their new sibling.

Reassure yourself that it is perfectly natural for a child to behave in these ways and it does not mean that they will never love the baby. Try to respond with patience and understanding – admittedly not easy when you are juggling the demands of a newborn.

WHAT TO DO AFTER THE BIRTH

- Consider buying a small present to give to the child from the baby.
- Discuss how delicate the new baby is and how you carefully hold and care for them.
- Include them in the new baby's care by getting them to be the 'big helper' or look after their own 'baby' alongside so that they feel involved.
- Try to keep your older child in as normal routine as possible to support security.
- Don't make everything about the new baby. Chat to your older child about what they have done at nursery, a TV programme they watched or simply what's for dinner.
- Make the effort to give them extra praise and cuddles and try to give them attention whenever possible, such as reading to them while feeding the baby or playing together when the baby is sleeping. This will help them feel reassured that they still have your love.
- Try to embrace the early chaos and relax into life as a bigger family. ■



There's a House Inside My Mummy by Giles Andreae and Vanessa Cabban

A funny picture book about waiting for a new brother or sister to be born.



The New Small Person by Lauren Child

Elmore started life as an only child and wants it to stay that way, but one day everything changes.



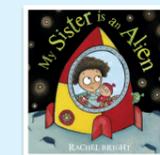
Sophie and the New Baby by Catherine and Laurence Anholt

A story acknowledging the mixed feelings that a new arrival can bring, along with reassurance about the good times ahead.



I'm a Big Brother / I'm a Big Sister by Joanna Cole

These simple stories lay out all the good things about being an older sibling and how exciting welcoming a new family member can be.



My Sister is an Alien by Rachel Bright

Alfie thinks only about space until his new sister comes along. Then he realises that she must be an alien, which is when the adventure starts.