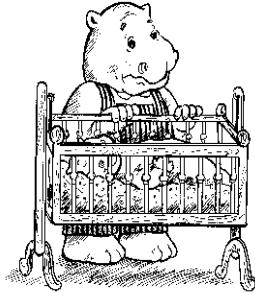


Bringing Home the Second Baby

Some parents assume their child will welcome the new baby into the family with love, affection and delight. Others expect jealousy, hostility and misbehaviour.



The truth is, both these reactions are extremes. Most children will feel a very wide range of emotions about their new sibling. Fortunately, there is much that parents can do to set the stage for a happy transition to becoming a two-child family.

Introduce the Idea

Long before you actually start talking about your new baby, introduce the idea that families often have several children. As you go about your daily life, point out families that you see, particularly those with both toddlers and babies. Promote the idea that this is a good thing!

Parents sometimes worry that they can't communicate with pre-verbal children, but children understand much more than they speak. Just keep talking to them, using simple language and, whenever possible, speaking about things they can also see.

The nine months of pregnancy are a very long time for a child to wait, so wait to talk about your pregnancy until your child can actually see your body changing. But if you can't keep yourself from telling friends and family, make sure you tell your child too. Your child should hear it from you, not others. Keep it simple.

Independent Life

If you normally care for your child at home, help her develop interests and friendships outside of your home before the new baby arrives.

Fortunately, toddlers like to play with other children. She may be shy to start with, so use the early and middle months of pregnancy to introduce her to a play group a couple mornings a week. You can also form friendships with other parents of similarly aged children here who would like to exchange play visits.

Make Changes Early

Children don't like change, so it is important to separate any changes in your toddlers' life with the new baby. Changes in routine, such as expecting the child to toilet train or stop breastfeeding are best accomplished well before the new baby arrives. Changes in caregivers should be made early.

Baby Talk

Once you've told your child that a new baby is on the way, answer his questions as he raises them, but if he seems disinterested, let it be. Near the end of the pregnancy you can introduce age appropriate books and videos about pregnancy and birth. Bring out his baby photos and talk about how excited you were when he was on the way.

If she will be staying with Grandma for a few nights during the birth, make sure you have a couple of practice overnights and that these are pleasant experiences for her.

Most young children like to be helpful so ask her to help you fold and put away the baby's clothes. As you make preparations, make her part of them, asking her advice about wallpaper patterns or new sheets.

Be realistic about what new babies are like - avoid talking them up as 'a playmate', because they won't be for quite some time. Seek out opportunities to show your child what a newborn looks and behaves like.

Birth Day

Even if it is the middle of the night, wake your child to tell him that you're going to the hospital to have the baby. Remind him of whatever arrangements have been made for his care and assure him that you will see him in just a couple days.

Welcome Home

Depending on his age, your great big boy may take one look at the baby and regress into earlier, more baby-like behaviors himself. If he's recently been toilet trained, he may start wetting his pants. If he's recently moved out of his crib, he may want it back. Just relax. In time, he will get his 'grown-up' behavior back.

Prepare for peaceful feeding times by organizing a snack and drink for your older child, putting their favourite tape into the machine or getting the books they want to read together. Some mothers like to position their babies in a 'sling' while they breastfeed as this leaves at least one hand free for turning pages and giving hugs to the older child.

Night Visitors

Expect a little night visitor. Whether it's because you have the new baby in your bedroom with you or because they're just generally insecure about sharing your attention, it is common for children to come into their parents' beds at night. This could be sweet, but little night visitors tend to keep everyone awake. You can lead them back to their beds and go through the final steps of their bedtime routine or fold a quilt or sleeping bag into a bed on the floor beside yours and suggest that they sleep there when they need to. This very often satisfies a child's need to be close and lets parents get the sleep they need.

Enlist Their Help

Young children love to help and this is a good way to help create a sense that this is their baby too. Give them real tasks to do. Promote the idea that the baby likes them and tell people that, "We think the baby likes Lorne the best." In time, of course, the baby will like Lorne the best because younger children tend to adore their older siblings.

Acknowledge Emotions

To older children, babies can be a BIG nuisance. And it's hard to be 'big' all the time and wait for Mom to finish feeding the baby or Dad to get the baby settled into bed. Don't try to argue them out of their feelings, acknowledge their feelings and give them words to describe these feelings.

Make special time just for them each day. Instead of rushing around trying to get housework done or dinner made while the baby sleeps, slow down and spend time with your older child. If she is still napping, snuggle close and take a nap together or share a snack and read her favourite book. Make your older child the centre of the universe again, for at least a few minutes. Assure her that you have room in your heart for her and baby.

This BC HealthFile has presented some ideas to help you with the challenge of parenting. There are other topics in the child development series that you may also find helpful. The BC HealthFiles link and this series can be found on the BC HealthGuide Web site at:

www.bchealthguide.org/healthfiles/index.stm



For more BC HealthFile topics visit www.bchealthguide.org/healthfiles/index.stm, or visit your local public health unit.

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