

Introducing your firstborn to your newborn baby

Written by Sister Elizabeth Beavon
Tuesday, 02 July 2013 11:50



Thank goodness for a long gestation, it gives us plenty of time to prepare our older children for the arrival of a new baby.

Having another baby can be both exciting and daunting; there will be many changes in routines and relationships. Some planning and preparation can go a long way towards a smooth transition to these new routines and relationships.

Firstborns have been the sole object of their parent's affection and they are now going to have to share this attention which may be problematic for them. They are often too young to understand and verbalise the emotional turmoil they may be experiencing. They can intuitively pick up on the mothers shift in the focus of attention during the pregnancy. If they are old enough to understand the idea of the baby they may experience the mutual joy and excitement as well as fearfulness at being pushed aside.

Some practical planning:

Having to use the older child's cot for the new baby is a very common situation. Move older child into their new bed well in advance.

If you are still breastfeeding, you may need to wean the older child. You can still breastfeed both children, but the baby will take precedence.

Try and continue with your *toddler's routine* as much as possible before and after babies arrival. Do not try start playgroup or nursery school for the first time as the new baby arrives, the older one may feel as if they are being sent off somewhere whilst mom devotes time to new baby. Start the new routine of playgroup or school whilst still pregnant.

Discuss and involve older child in preparing for new baby as much as possible. Let them feel kicking movements, take them to Drs appointments, show them the printed out scans of baby. Explain how the new baby will need more of your attention. They will need carrying, feeding, holding when they cry. Older children also need to understand that the little baby is not going to

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be an immediate playmate and that they need to grow a bit first.

Plan ahead for the time when you will be in hospital. Find out if older child can visit you in hospital or if they need to wait till you get home.

When baby does arrive and the first visit takes place, swop gifts between the siblings.

Dealing with difficult behaviour:

An older child may resent the time and attention being spent on the new baby and as a result may display negative behaviour. They can often be rough and boisterous, they can withdraw, they may also exhibit good or bad behaviour in order to get your attention.

Be patient, nurturing and understanding of emotions rather than behaviour. Let older child know what they are and are not allowed to do with the baby. Providing structure and limits helps the older child adjust as well as feel safe and secure within their own roles.

Feeding can be a difficult time as your attention can be divided. Let older sibling sit next to you and read a book, or set up an activity that doesn't need your supervision and explain that you will have time together after the feed.

Remember to notice and point out good behaviour-"*I was so pleased that you played quietly whilst I was busy with baby, would you like to do something special with Mommy now?*"

" this follows the strategy of ignoring bad and rewarding good.

Thank them if they are being helpful in any way and involve them in small tasks when dealing with baby.

If baby needs a lot of carrying, use a sling or pouch as this will allow you to hold hands with your firstborn.

As a parent one also needs to remember that the time spent with the new baby is not going to exactly the same as with the first. The dynamics have changed and the time spent with new baby may not be as intense or focused. There will, however, be many *magical moments* as you witness the fascinating dynamics between *siblings*