

How do I best prepare my toddler for the arrival of a new baby?

By Stacy DeBroff

The arrival of a new baby into the world is of course an occasion of excitement and joy—but for the newborn's sibling, it can be one of heartfelt jealousy and confusion. I remember when I brought my son Brooks from the hospital. The next day he was all wrapped up in the bassinette next to our bed and lost in that deep, deep sleep checking out from the world of which only newborns seem truly capable.

My daughter Kyle, who was 18 months old at the time, flung herself on the floor in what could only be described as unmitigated toddler grief. "Oh no!" she cried wailing and wreathing on the floor to my complete dismay. "Take baby BACK! Oh noooo!"

It was worse than I thought, as I felt the wild abandon of love for Kyle, remorse that the arrival of Brooks had taken on the epic of toddler tragedy, and the realization that I had a much bigger uphill climb to sibling acceptance that I had ever imagined. Kyle clearly wanted me to return Brooks to whence he came, perhaps Toys R Us where she could get something in exchange? But I had come prepared! Out of our bathroom rolled an oversize blue plastic wagon that Kyle could sit in and motor with her small, socked feet.

"This," I declared, "is the present that Brooks got just for you as his new big sister." Kyle looked doubtfully up from the floor as Brooks' curled sleeping form, back at the beckoning wagon, and with eyebrows furled in wary resignation and lingering concern opted to plunge into what could only be described as a gift with her impeccable taste in mind. Sibling crisis #1 averted!

In the process of four years later interviewing over 500 parents for [The Mom Book: 4,278 Tips for Moms](#), I learned that there were ingenious parental solutions way beyond the blatant bribe I had come up with as a new Mom. To acclimate your young child to her little sister or brother, begin long before your baby is born; and continue to be understanding and patient as she adapts to this big change in her small world.

Before Baby arrives

- Give your child a time frame she can understand for when the baby will arrive, such as right after her birthday, around Christmas time, or just before nursery school ends for the summer.
- Give your child the appropriate expectations: explain to her that for the first few months the baby will do little more than eat, sleep, and cry.

- Take your child on a brief tour of the hospital where you will deliver. Explain all the details of who will look after her and where she will stay while you are in the hospital.
- Tell your child the story of her birth and when you were pregnant with her.
- Read books or watch videos about becoming a big sister or brother.
- Decorate the newborn's room with your child.
- Make major changes, such as toilet training or giving up a pacifier or bottle, at least a few months before you expect to give birth, and expect backsliding once the baby comes.
- If you plan to use your older child's crib for the new baby, get her into her new bed long before baby comes. Remove the crib from the room for a while so when you return it for your new baby, your older child will not think of it as her crib. Buy new bedding and bumpers for your baby so your child doesn't feel like she's turning over her entire bed to a newcomer.
- Start your child's new routine a few weeks before your baby is due. Have helpers begin coming to the house, or start her at a new day care program or school.
- Begin arranging time for your child to spend alone with grandparents, caregivers, and your partner, so others can tend to her needs while you care for the baby.
- Sit for a friend or relative's baby a few times before the birth of your new child, to get her used to having a baby around.

After Baby arrives

- Do not blame the baby for big changes that disrupt your older child's life. If you can't go outside because of the baby's naptime, or if your child has to stay quiet because the baby is sleeping, don't always point out that it's the baby's fault; by doing so, you risk giving your child reasons to resent the baby.
- Allow your older child new privileges, such as a later bed time or extended playtime hours.
- Let your child overhear you talking about what a great older sibling she is.
- Do not try to make your child stay quiet while the baby sleeps. Your baby will adapt to the noise, and your older child's life will be less disrupted.
- If you find yourself in the middle of an activity with your older child when your baby begins crying, wait a minute or two before responding to show the importance of what you two have been doing and that your connection to your older child remains strong.
- If your child and the baby do not share a room, tell your older child that her room will be off-limits to the baby, and ask her to keep her toys with small parts there. Offer to get a gate to keep the baby out. This way your child does not have to keep her door closed all the time and feel isolated in the process.

Of course, this is only the beginning of the ongoing sibling contention. My husband, an only child, asked me the other day when I thought that Kyle and Brooks (now 13 and 11) would stop fighting with each other. "Gee," I said, "I don't even think that they fight all that much. I have seen much worse." He responded, "You have got to be kidding! Seriously, when will this end?" I reflected and reassured him that at least by their early 30s! But that of course, is the topic of a whole other article!

<http://www.womensweb.ca/pregnancy/siblings/index.php>