

Children all are individual in their reaction to the birth of a new brother or sister. Children over three years of age are usually excited by the birth of a new baby. Children under three may not welcome a new baby with open arms, but here are some ideas to help foster an early friendship.

- Talk to the baby in your tummy and let your other child join in the conversation.
- Read books to your older child about pregnancy, birth and being a big brother or sister.
- Wait until your last trimester or when they notice a change in you to talk to younger children about the baby. Children this young don't have a concept of months passing before the baby will arrive.
- You might want to make your own personalized sibling preparation book with pictures of your older child when they were a baby and pictures of your hospital.
- Your child may want to feel the baby kick in your uterus or attend a prenatal visit to hear the baby's heartbeat.
- Attend sibling class at the hospital.
- Your two year old is probably more interested in what is going to happen to him while you are gone than what's going to happen at the hospital. Talk about the separation from mom as something special, "grandma is coming to our house and will bake cookies and take you to the park..."
- If possible, it is best to leave a two year old in his own home with someone he knows and enjoys.
- Get out your child's baby book and go through it with him, paying special attention to how you cared for him when he was a baby, rocking, holding a lot, nursing, etc.
- If you are planning any big changes for the older child such as a room change, bed change or potty training do it early in the pregnancy.
- Encourage the older child to help participate in making plans for the baby, decorating the nursery, getting out baby equipment, packing an outfit for baby to wear home from the hospital, etc.
- Take the older child to the store to buy a gift

for the baby. They can exchange gifts at the hospital.

- Record bedtime stories on a tape that can be played for your older child while you are at the hospital. Say "goodnight" at the end of the tape.
- For younger children, practice talking on the telephone, so you can call and talk to your child from the hospital.

## AFTER THE BABY IS BORN

- Call your older child as soon as the new baby arrives (unless it is the middle of the night) to tell him the good news first. Let your child make the announcement to whoever is caring for him if he wants to. Don't be disappointed if he is not quite as excited as you are.
- Encourage sibling hospital visits. It's best not to bring home a stranger.
- Have a birthday party when siblings visit at the hospital or for the homecoming.



- Help your older child feel important too. Wrap up some small gifts for the baby to give to the older child when he visits in the hospital. Also wrap up some surprises to have at home for the older child when friends bring gifts for the baby.
- Let the older child hold the baby as much as he wants (with supervision), and participate in the care of the baby as much as possible (getting diapers, toys, etc.).
- Make a game out of “mommy or daddy’s little helper” changing diapers, loving, dressing, and bathing baby.
- Pack a new T-shirt that says “I’m a big brother” or “I’m a big sister” and leave it with whoever is keeping your older child so they can give it to him as soon as the new baby is born.
- Have an older child pass out something special to announce the birth of the baby (candy, gum, etc.)
- On birth announcements have them read: (your child’s name) proudly announces the birth of his new baby brother or sister.
- Spend special time alone with siblings throughout the day and at bed time. Talk, hold, hug and love a child whenever you see signs of jealous behavior. Allow siblings to talk about negative feelings.
- Dad can help take up the slack during those first few weeks at home when mom is so busy with baby. The older child will enjoy doing special things with dad.
- Give older child special jobs, such as setting a table, and praise him/her for the contribution.



- Have a special place in the corner of the room with a few toys and books, when ready to feed the baby get these items out along with a drink for the older child. Try to tend to the needs of the older child first.
- Always praise positive behavior.
- Avoid statements like “You now have a new playmate” when this is not going to occur for a long time.
- Expect some negative or regressive behavior from the older child. After all, his adjustment to the new baby is at least as great as your adjustment to your first baby. What is needed is lots of love and reassurance.
- It is best not to try to convince the older child that he or she is a big boy or big girl or to tell the older child to “grow-up”. One look at all the holding, cuddling, loving and attention the baby is getting is enough to convince the other child being little is best. It’s normal for the sibling to regress in daily habits, toileting, eating, sleeping, etc. It can be helpful to point out that everyone may think the baby is cute to look at but they sure can’t do any fun stuff like riding a bike, eating a popsicle, coloring, painting or making cookies.

