

Bringing Home Baby



By Dr. Jenn Berman

Most parents find that bringing home their second baby is more emotionally complicated than it was with the first baby. While this is an exciting and joyful time, most parents wisely anticipate strong reactions from their firstborn.

Laying the Groundwork

Most parents choose to wait to let a young child know that mom is pregnant until he asks about mom's growing belly, which is often a sign that he is emotionally ready to deal with the information. Make sure to process what is happening with your child, even if he is just a toddler.

Books are a great way to talk about the pregnancy and changes in your family. There are many age appropriate books about what to expect when the baby comes. Try making your own book (this can be done using services like Kodak Easyshare, Snapfish, or with the help of Kinkos) that talks about how things are now, how they will change and how they will stay the same. This is a great time to look at photos of your child when he was a baby and share stories about when he was little.

Do your best to include him in the baby preparations. Let him help pick the baby's sheets, toys, etc. (choosing between two acceptable choices, of course). This helps him feel like he has some power in the situation, helps him to be more invested, and gives him the chance to share in some of the excitement with you.

The Hospital

Make sure to let your child know who will be taking care of

him while you are at the hospital and what the plan is for while you are gone. You may want to buy a special little toy that you leave out to signal that you have gone to the hospital, in case you have to go in the middle of the night. Make sure you call your child while you are in the hospital, especially if you have to stay more than one night. If the hospital will allow it, let your child come visit you and the baby. Many parents like to buy a special gift "from the baby" for the older sibling and one from the older sibling for the baby that he picks out in advance of the birth.

After Baby Is Home

When you come home from the hospital, the baby should not be in mommy's arms, so she can be free for hugs right away. This way the baby does not act as a physical barrier between mother and the older child. If you can, organize your arrival time so that you don't have to nurse the baby immediately when you come home but, instead, can spend some one-on-one time with your child.

Sharing Mom and Dad

As time goes on, it is important to be attentive to your child even when you are taking care of your new baby. Let him be involved in age appropriate ways. For example, younger kids can "help" you pick out the baby's outfit, can hand you a diaper when needed or sing the baby a song. In order to provide stability for the older sibling, keep his schedule as consistent as possible after the baby arrives. Predictability provides safety and security for a child during times of big change.

Make sure that each parent

spends special one-on-one time with the older child separate from the baby. A 20 minute story and cuddle go a long way in terms of filling up the "love bank." Do your best to have regular "special time" with your child after the baby comes. That "special time" can even be running to the store together to pick up diapers, if it is just the two of you. Of course having special time with your child where he gets to do his favorite activities is even better. Try to catch him being "good" with the baby (i.e. "I noticed how gentle you were with your little sister" or "I saw you hand the baby her pacifier when she dropped it. That was so helpful.").

When your baby becomes mobile, find ways to protect your older child's belongings. Children should not be forced to share all their toys and things. Ownership is identity and kids need to feel like they have their own possessions.

Children should never be left in the room alone with a baby and they should not be given tasks to do where they could potentially drop or hurt the baby. Aside from not being careful or gentle enough, even older kids don't fully understand the consequences of their actions. For example, a child might put a pillow over a crying baby to quiet her without realizing that it could kill her.

The Storm Within

Anticipate that children will have a lot of negative feelings about the new baby, and help them to understand those feelings. Instead of saying, "You don't really hate the baby!" which is invalidating and makes a child less likely to talk to

you about her feelings, try saying, "It is really hard sharing Mommy, isn't it?" Children's biggest fears are of abandonment. They are afraid that mom and dad won't love them as much, will like the new baby more, or that they will be forgotten. They also worry that they will have to share all their toys.

Bringing a new child into the house is a major disruption and a trauma for a child. It is expected that there will be behavioral regressions. Typically those regressions happen in the areas of potty training, sleeping, and separation (expect clinginess!). Some of this is anxiety based and some if it has to do with seeing all the attention the new baby gets for having those types of needs. Give these behaviors words ("It looks like you really want to be a baby now too) and let the child play baby a little. Many parents make the mistake of saying, "You don't want to be a baby. You're a big girl now! Act like one!", or something along those lines. But the truth is that most children feel very conflicted, especially toddlers and preschoolers. One part of them wants to be a baby and another part (the "I can do it!" part) wants autonomy.

Dr. Jenn is a Marriage, Family and Child Therapist in private and the bestselling author of SuperBaby: 12 Ways to Give Your Child a Head Start in the First 3 Years and The A to Z Guide to Raising Happy, Confident Kids. Her first children's book, Rockin' Babies, will be released May 2011. Dr. Jenn can be heard every night on Cosmo Radio on Sirius XM. She is also the owner of an eco-friendly clothing line for adults and kids called Retail Therapy. For more information go to DoctorJenn.com.

MORE

Recommended Reading

Toddler Age

"My New Baby" by Rachel Fuller

"I'm a Big Sister or I'm a Big Brother" by Joanna Cole

"On Mother's Lap" by Ann Herbert Scott

"Little Bear's Little Boat" by Eve Bunting

Preschool

"The New Baby (Usborne First Experiences)"

Illustrated by Stephen Cartwright

"The New Baby" by Fred Rogers

"The New Baby at Your House" by Joanna Cole

Kindergarten and Up

"What to Expect When the New Baby Comes Home" by Heidi Merhoff

"Babies Don't Eat Pizza" by Dianne Danzig

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