

Doc Talk

By Dr. Veronica Naudin



Preparing for the new arrival

I am having my second child this summer. What do you suggest for preparing my first child for his new sibling.

Congratulations on the newest addition to your family. It is definitely a good idea to brainstorm and to plan and discuss your strategy for preparing your older child and or children for the arrival of a new sibling with family and friends. It is a very exciting and stressful time for all members of your immediate family. All children, no matter how old, require a period of adjustment to new members of the family. However, most families seem to adjust to this transition period without much difficulty.

When to break the news: When you introduce the idea of a growing fetus in your belly may depend on the age of your child. Older children (over 10), may enjoy hearing about the monthly growth and development of the growing baby, while younger children (under 4), may benefit by not being notified about the new baby until you are past the first and possibly the second trimester. You will have to judge the appropriateness of such news for your children. However, keep in mind that most children will appreciate a change in your behavior and energy level. They will want to know that nothing is seriously wrong with their mommy if your pregnancy is quite noticeable due to extreme fatigue or morning sickness. Also, small children are not very good at keeping secrets. So once you have told your small child, you should anticipate that you have also notified the preschool, daycare, and neighborhood friends.

Classes, videos, and books: Yes, it is a good idea to read books and watch videos about new siblings to your child. This often provides your child with an opportunity to ask you questions about his/her new sibling. If you have picked out a name, you can share how baby X will compare with the baby in the book. Also, you can tell your small child how you felt when you were pregnant with them. And don't forget to pull out newborn pictures of your older child and/or children and the baby books. This can be a very wonderful sharing time for you and your child. In addition, most hospitals now have sibling classes that will help prepare the 3 - 6 year old for the arrival of a new baby. It is helpful for young children to see where Mommy will be when the new baby arrives and to learn a little bit about newborns.

Planning changes: If you are planning changes in bedrooms, housing, cribs and or schools, sooner generally seems to be better. For crib and bedroom changes, you can often transition your older child to a different room and or crib and combine this change with a change in decor. This often is viewed as a more positive change and will prevent your child from feeling that the baby is replacing him. If you have a toddler that is just about ready to be toilet trained, you can anticipate that most toddlers will regress to wearing diapers after the newborn arrives. My usual rule of thumb is that unless the toddler has been potty trained for a year, you should anticipate beginning potty training when your newborn hits six months. Finally, if you have older children, you should include them in the planning of school changes and encourage him/her to participate in the arrangements for the new baby.

When the baby arrives: Wrap up small gifts for your child to give to the baby and have some for you to give to the older child when friends and relatives bring gifts for the baby. Introduce your child to your new baby and give him some small tasks to do for helping mommy with the baby. One of my favorites is to give your older child the task of making his sibling smile and laugh. Finally, when you are arriving home from the hospital, have someone else carry the newborn so that your arms are open for the older child.

Good luck with the anticipated change in your family. I am sure this will be a joyous time. If you have any other concerns and need for additional resources, please contact your pediatrician for guidance.

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