Adjusting to a Baby Sibling

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Having a baby is a joyful and exciting life event. But it can also be stressful. Parenting two children can feel like much more than twice the work at first. And you may feel concerned that you couldn't possibly love another child as much as the one you already have. However, caregivers (and older siblings!) usually make room in their hearts to love a new baby (and if you're struggling to connect with your baby, check in with your HS Specialist). How your older child reacts can make the transition more or less challenging. Here are some tips that may help:

WHAT TO EXPECT FROM YOUR OLDER CHILD:

- **Upset and mixed-up feelings.** They may seem excited at first, but they will also likely have tantrums and say mean things about the baby. Try not to react strongly to this behavior.
- **Regression.** They may use baby talk, want to be held a lot, or have potty accidents. Offer them lots of cuddles and maybe even a playful swaddle. Reassure them that they are loved.
- **Aggression.** They may hit or scratch the baby or try to give a really long (and too tight) hug. Keep a close eye and stop them every time.

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The good news is there is a lot you can do to help your older child adjust to a new baby:

- **Prepare them before the baby arrives.** It is impossible to truly prepare a young child for a new sibling. However, you can read books and talk about it. Let your older child know that the baby will be small and cry a lot.
- **Validate emotions.** Say, "You seem upset. It is hard to wait but I will play with you as soon as I'm done with this diaper." Then, listen to their upset and be ready with hugs.
- **Invite their help.** Sometimes older siblings like to help out and can get you a diaper or wipes when you need them (but don't push if they aren't interested).
- **Model how to be safe.** Teach your child how to touch the baby. Use a doll or a stuffy to show what is gentle touch and what is too rough. It is fine if they are rough with the doll—toddlers are generally hard on all their toys! This behavior doesn't mean that they will be that rough with their sibling. However, your older child will need close supervision. If they grab or hit the baby, calmly but firmly stop them and gently but firmly restrain their hands—then show them how to do it gently.

RECOMMENDED BOOKS:

- *The New Small Person* by Lauren Child
- *Spellbound* by Jess Townes and Jennifer Harne
- *King Baby* by Kate Beaton
- *Babies Ruin Everything* by Matthew Swanson and Robbi Behr
- *I Used To Be Famous* by Becky Cattie and Tara Luebbe
- *Lola Read To Leo (Leo Can!)* by Anna McQuinn and Rosalind Beardshaw

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- **Keep limits in place.** You may feel guilty or sad about the changes the baby has brought to your family, but don't try to make up for it with extra treats or weak boundaries. Giving in shows your child you think they cannot cope with this change.
- **Build in one-on-one time.** Find time to connect with your older child. Have some time together during baby's nap or invite them to the grocery store. Let them know your love for them has not changed one bit!
- **Give it time.** New babies don't do much and can be boring to older children. Also, the new baby means someone is taking away *their* attention. Don't expect things to be rosy at first. Give your older child time and space to connect with their new sibling.

Bringing home a new baby may be chaotic for a while. However, adding a sibling to the family can also benefit your older child. The new sibling may teach them how to cooperate and share. It can also build empathy—the awareness that others have feelings and needs. So, buckle up, it's going to be a wild, wonderful, and very worthwhile ride!

SCAN FOR MORE INFO

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