

## **Sibling Preparation**

When people embark upon the journey of parenthood, they never know quite what to expect. Parents learn a lot with their first child, but they may have a hard time imagining what life will be like with two. In the same way, the first child has no idea what life will be like when another child is added to the mix.

One of the biggest decisions is whether the older children should be present at the birth of the new baby. Each family must make the best decision for themselves about whether any older children will be present for the birth. Parents must take into consideration numbers of factors, including their own comfort level with having the older child(ren) there, the age and temperament of any older children, any health conditions and risk factors associated with the pregnancy, and the support available to care for other children during labor and birth.

There are many advantages. It is an amazing experience that can teach an older sibling about life, biology and the miracle of birth. It can also help an older sibling feel connected to and excited about the new baby, as well as make it very clear that the baby "belongs" to the entire family. It helps avoid that strange disconnection that can come from mommy disappearing (or the child being taken elsewhere if the birth is at home) for awhile and then, all of a sudden, there's a new baby stealing the scene.

Any sibling who is going to be at the birth will need supervision and special care from an adult other than her parents, who will both be busy with the birth. This adult should be someone the child loves and trusts and also someone who will be able to "read" the child: does she need to be taken for a walk when the labor becomes intense, does she need to have something explained so she understands what is normal, etc.

Start talking to your older children about the new addition to your family as early as you are comfortable. Let them feel the baby, talk to the baby, make things for the baby, help you prepare clothing and gear for the baby. Start making the baby as much a part of your family as you can. At the same time, assure your child that he or she is, of course, a highly valued part of the family as well. There will be many feelings that your child will have throughout your pregnancy and in the adjustment period afterwards. This is all normal and your child will look to you for help in dealing with these sometimes overwhelming emotions.

Try to put yourself in your older child's shoes. Understand that the new baby's arrival can be a rude awakening for an older sibling. Take plenty of time, even after the baby is born (we know it's difficult) to explain in a loving way that this new baby needs their love as much as yours. Show how to love the baby. Include your older child in everything that they show the slightest interest in from bathing to rocking. Explain that, even though the baby isn't really a playmate right now, he will be before they know it. Also, don't be surprised if your big boy or girl suddenly wants to be a baby again. He may forget how to use his big boy words and she may have accidents for the first time in her life. This is all normal and you can ease them over this hurdle by being understanding and recognizing the emotions that are behind the behavior.

Most important is that your older child feels involved and also that he or she still feels a special connection with you. Be sure to set aside even just a few minutes a day for just the two of you – especially in those first few months after the baby arrives. You can make this easier on yourself by making sure you have adequate postpartum support. If family and friends are not available, consider hiring a postpartum doula. We can recommend several excellent doulas in the area.

There are many videos and books geared to children that can help prepare your older child for childbirth and for being an older sister or brother. Several of these are listed at the bottom of this page, and we can recommend more. There is also a large selection of sibling preparation classes in the area that we can tell you about.

### **Suggested Books for You and Your Older Children:**

[Baby On the Way](#) (Sears Children Library), by Martha Sears, William Sears, Christie Watts Kelly, Renee Andriani

[Welcome With Love](#), by Jenni Overend and Julie Vivas

[Mom and Dad and I Are Having a Baby](#), by Maryann Malecki