



## TODDLERS—NEW BABY

# Preparing your toddler for a sibling

What can I do to prepare my toddler for the new baby?

### INFORMATION

Having another baby is wonderful and stressful. Your toddler will notice the new baby mostly from the perspective of how this change affects him. Toddlers respond to new siblings in a variety of ways. Your toddler may withdraw, become unusually quiet, or become demanding, disruptive and aggressive. Your toddler can also react by waking up more at night or refusing to use the potty. Your toddler might want to help by entertaining or holding the baby, or getting a diaper for you when the baby has a dirty diaper. Your toddler may also ignore the baby.

### Action Steps

Tips to prepare your toddler for this big change:

#### While pregnant

Once it is obvious you are pregnant, or you know that another baby is coming into your life through adoption, fostering or surrogacy, talk to your toddler about the new baby. Tell your toddler about where the baby is now. Answer your toddler's questions and follow her lead. Read picture books about having a new sibling. There are many books at the local library about a new sibling coming into the family through adoption, surrogacy and pregnancy.

Tell your toddler you love him. Reassure him your feelings for him will never change. If your toddler is interested, include him in preparing for the new baby.

Teach your toddler about babies. If you know someone with a new baby, introduce your child to that baby. Show your toddler how fragile and dependent a new baby is. Explain that everyone needs to be gentle with babies. Teach and practice "gentle touches" with a doll at home. Talk about your child's special role as a big sister or brother.

Talk about emotions with your toddler. Imagine with your toddler feeling happy, excited, frustrated, angry and jealous — all these emotions will be present when the new baby arrives. Reassure him that all these feelings are OK. Prepare him that a baby's needs cannot wait, so sometimes you will ask your toddler to wait. Together, choose a phrase your toddler can use to let you know he is upset like, "I want attention." When you hear him use this phrase, do your best to find a way to support and reassure him.

Explain that babies need to eat often. It will be hard for your toddler to watch you feed the baby without feeling left out. Think together about ways your toddler can help. Handing you a pillow or burping cloth, sitting next to you while you read her a story, or drawing you a picture are a few options. Have your child brainstorm ideas that will work well for her.

As your due date approaches, try not to make significant changes in your toddler's routine. You will want his life to continue with as much consistency as possible. This is not a good time to move your toddler from her crib to a bed, change childcare providers or potty train. The new baby will be as much change as your toddler can handle.

Talk about the baby during your pregnancy. Imagine with your toddler how the new baby will arrive in the world and into your family. Whether you are planning a hospital or home birth, or will travel to pick up the baby, share these plans with your toddler. If you plan to go to the hospital, or travel, talk to your toddler about who will care for her while you are gone.

## While at the hospital, or traveling to pick up the baby

Contact your toddler frequently.

## Returning home

Your toddler will be very excited to see you! Be ready to have someone else hold the baby (or have the baby in the infant car seat) so you can give your toddler a big hug and kiss. Some families give their toddler a gift, saying it is from the new baby. The baby will seem boring. Your toddler imagined a friend to play with, not a newborn.

Ask visitors to give special attention to your toddler first, and then greet the baby.

## During the first few weeks

You will need help. Set up a meal train before your baby is born. Freeze easy-to-reheat dinners. Ask family and friends to help — cleaning, cooking or playing with your toddler. When the baby is asleep, spend time with your toddler. He will soak up the focused love and attention, and better tolerate other times in the day when your focus is on the baby.

Toddlers are not old enough to understand how to hold a newborn gently. Supervise all interactions between your toddler and the baby. Intervene if you see any aggressive behavior from your toddler toward the new baby. *Time In* strategies are a good option if your toddler is showing signs of sadness, anger, frustration or stress. Find ways to spend some time together each day without the baby.

