

How You Can Prepare Your Child for a New Brother or Sister

One of the biggest worries expectant parents who also have toddlers deal with is how to help their toddler adjust to a new baby sibling.

As a counselor who has helped patients walk through this journey, and as a mother who has helped her toddler adapt to a new baby sibling, the most valuable advice I can offer parents is this: Limit the amount of adjustments your toddler goes through three months prior to and three months following the introduction of a new baby into the family.

Toddlers are pretty resilient. Their brains, however, are not able to process adjustments to the same capacity as adults. To minimize the amount of anxiety your toddler may experience, I've rounded up a few tips to help you transition your toddler into welcoming their new sibling at home in a way that is enjoyable.

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Three Months Prior

If your toddler is not yet potty trained, this is not the time to start.. Doing so will put you and your toddler under a lot of stress.

Toddlers follow our emotional cues. The best way to bring up their upcoming new sibling to them is by communicating to them that they will have a playmate, a best friend and so forth (focus on the use of positive words) in order to create excitement and anticipation. Make sure these adjectives and

words are aimed *at your toddler*. Instead of saying “I can’t wait until your baby brother/sister is born,” which may foster jealousy. I recommend saying, “Your baby brother/sister will be so excited to meet you. You’re going to be the best brother/sister ever!”

Birth

Expect your toddler to regress. When he/she does regress, please refrain from blaming yourself or telling yourself that you are an awful parent. Regression is very typical during this period as your toddler is trying to figure out his/her place within the family. In order to help with this transition, I recommend having a family member or a trusted friend come over and help with your baby so you can allocate one-on-one time with your toddler. This will reemphasize to them that they are still important to you and will help alleviate any anxiety related to feeling displaced.

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Three Months After

If you’re not a stay-at-home parent, this is usually the period in which you are gearing up to go back to work. Your baby and your toddler are likely going to be on two separate schedules. During this period, I encourage you to get in the habit of allocating at least one hour biweekly to spend one-on-one time with your toddler doing an activity they are specifically interested in. During this one-on-one time, there should be no focus on the baby but rather on the older sibling. This again will remind them that they are just as special to you as they were before their sibling came along.

Last and certainly not least, remember to give yourself grace during this period of transition. Every child is different. And remember—you’re not left without counsel. In Christ, you

have access to the one who knit your babies in your womb. He knows them ever so deeply. He knows every one of their hearts' cries. So lean on Him for wisdom (James 1:5). He is the author of wisdom. And when you need grace, call on Him (Heb. 4:16), He is right there with you.

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