



## American Academy of Pediatrics



DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN™

### Preparing Your Other Children for a New Baby

If you have other children, you'll need to plan carefully how and when to tell them about the new baby. A child who is 4 or older should be told as soon as you start telling friends and relatives. He also should be apprised of the basic facts about conception and pregnancy so he understands how he is related to his new brother or sister. Fables about storks and such may seem cute, but they won't help your youngster understand and accept the situation. Using one of the picture books published on the subject may help you to explain "where babies come from."

#### Preparing a Preschooler for a New Baby

If your child is younger than 4 when you become pregnant, you can wait awhile before telling him. When he's this young, he's still very self-centered and may have difficulty understanding an abstract concept like an unborn baby. Once you start furnishing the nursery, bringing his old crib back into the house, and making or buying baby clothes, he should be told what's going on. Also, take advantage of any questions he may ask about Mom's growing "stomach" to explain what's happening. Picture books can be helpful with very young children too. Even if he doesn't ask any questions, start talking to your older child about the baby by the last few months of pregnancy. If your hospital offers a sibling preparation class, take him so that he can see where the baby will be born and where he may visit you. Point out other newborns and their older siblings, and tell him how he's going to be a big brother soon.

Don't promise that things will be the same after the baby comes, because they won't be, no matter how hard you try. But reassure your child that you will love him just as much, and help him understand the positive side of having a baby sibling.

#### Preparing a Toddler for a New Baby

Breaking the news is most difficult if your child is between 2 and 3. At this age, he's still extremely attached to you and doesn't yet understand the concept of sharing time, possessions or your affection with anyone else. He's very sensitive to changes going on around him, and may feel threatened by the idea of a new family member. The best way to minimize his jealousy is to include him as much as possible in the preparations for the new baby. Let him shop with you for the layette and the nursery equipment. Show him pictures of himself as a newborn, and if you're recycling some of his old baby equipment, let him play with it a bit before you get it in order for the new comer.

Any major changes in your preschooler's routine, such as toilet training, switching from a crib to a bed, changing bedrooms, or starting nursery school, should be completed before the baby arrives. If that's not possible, put them off until after the baby is settled in at home. Otherwise, your youngster may feel overwhelmed when the upheaval caused by the baby's arrival is added to the stress of his own adjustments.

### **Coping with Reactions to a New Baby**

Don't be alarmed if news that a baby is coming, or, later, the baby's arrival, prompts your older child's behavior to regress a little. He may demand a bottle, ask to wear diapers again or refuse to leave your side. This is his way of demanding your love and attention and reassuring himself that he still has it. Instead of protesting or telling him to act his age, simply grant his requests, and don't get upset about it. A 3-year-old toilet-trained child who demands a diaper for a few days, or the 5-year-old who wants his outgrown (you thought long-forgotten) security blanket for a week, will soon return to his normal routine when he realizes that he now has just as important a place in the family as his new sibling.

However busy or preoccupied you may be with your new arrival, make sure you reserve some special time each day just for you and your older child. Read, play games, listen to music or simply talk together. Show him that you're interested in what he's doing, thinking, and feeling, not only in relation to the baby but about everything else in his life.