

# Bringing Home (Another) Baby

by Suzanne M. Brazil

When my girlfriend called to tell me the good news, I was excited and she was terrified. It seems her two (normally well-behaved) older boys, ages 11 and 9, were less than enthusiastic about the idea of a new baby in the family. With the instincts of a true mother, my friend had unveiled the news at a family restaurant, hoping to avoid a "scene." No such luck. Both boys stood up, one threw his napkin on his plate and the other knocked over a glass of milk, then stormed out to wait in the car.

My friend's experience is far from unique. Expecting a child should be a joyful time for mom and dad. However, older children do not always experience the same positive feelings. Experts agree that preparing older children for the arrival of a baby is the key to a successful transition for all involved.

While a mixture of positive and negative feelings regarding a new baby are normal, there are some things expecting parents can do to lessen any negative feelings that older children may experience.

## A Time For Honesty

Honesty is important. Just don't be too honest, too soon. Be sure your children learn of their impending sibling from you rather than other family members. Keeping them in the dark for too long can make them feel suspicious and left out. Children under three do not have a clear sense of time, so waiting a little longer to tell them is probably a good idea.

Some children will want to discuss the baby while others might act as if nothing is happening. Experts stress that both reactions are normal and you should make sure your child knows you're available to answer questions. In *The New Baby At Your House*,

author Joanna Cole suggests saying something like "Some children have worries when a new baby is coming. If you have any, you can tell me about them."

Make sure your explanations regarding the newborn are grounded in reality. New babies are usually not "fun" in the way that children expect. Crying, spitting up multi-colored goo and sleeping all day detract from a baby's desirability as the latest new toy. Babies do not play with older children, they do not share and they take up a lot of mom and dad's time and attention. Telling siblings that they'll have so much fun with the new baby can be a set-up for disappointment.

## Don't 'Blame' Baby

Parents should avoid "blaming" any changes on the new baby. For example, if a pregnant mom is too sore or tired to carry her toddler, she should say "mommy's back is sore," not "mommy can't carry you because of the new baby." Also, parents can help prevent festering resentment by making sure children understand what will happen when the baby is ready to come. Most children will be separated from their mothers for at least a couple of days. Make a plan and inform your child who will be staying with them ahead of time. There should be as few changes going on at this time as possible. For example, avoid starting your child in a new preschool or changing nannies, etc.

Most hospitals are aware that a successful birth doesn't begin and end in the delivery room. Many hospitals offer "Big Sister/Brother" programs. These can be invaluable as they provide a tour to show the child where mommy will be staying, a special certificate saying they are "trained" and an inside view on what babies are like. It's an event that focuses attention on them when they most need to feel special and important.

## Don't Leave Baby Alone With Toddler

Once the baby comes home, older children, regardless of age, need to be involved and they need to have alone time with both parents whenever it can be arranged. Toddlers do not need alone time with the infant. Aggressive feelings toward a new brother or sister are to be expected and should not be explained away. Aggressive actions, however, are another matter. Toddlers do not possess the self-control or judgment to prevent their feelings from turning into actions. Therefore, most experts recommend that toddlers not be left alone with infants for any period of time.

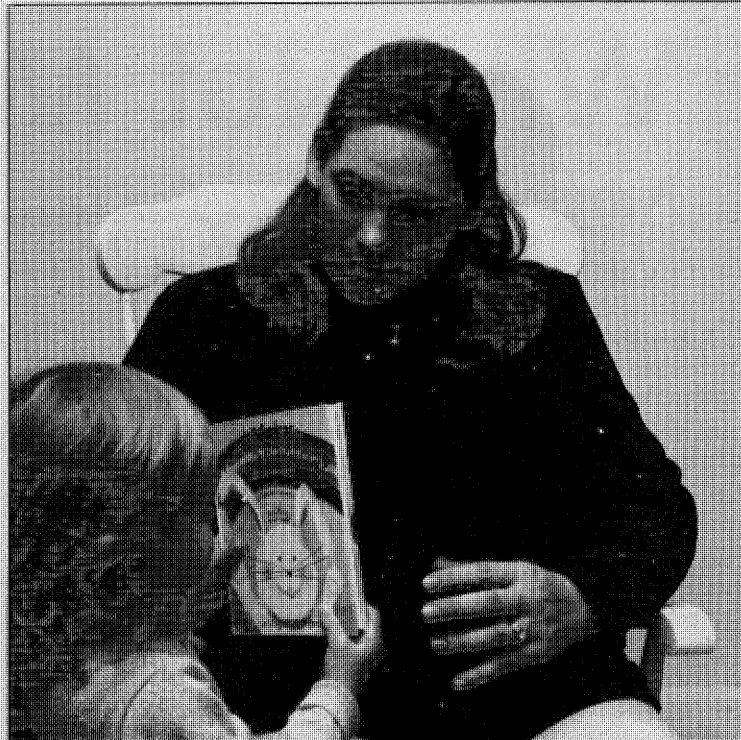
If all this seems like too much to do as you prepare for your new baby, remember that your "only" child is soon to become the "older" child. That recommendation comes from *What to Expect When the New Baby Comes Home* by author Heidi Murkoff. It will be so much easier to prepare them then to try and resolve hurt feelings or lingering resentments later on. Also, you just might find yourself with a more willing helper if you've helped to ready them for the experience.

Back to my girlfriend and her less-than-enthusiastic older children; after a lot of time and attention from mom and dad, little sister was brought home to some grinning and soon-to-be over-protective big brothers.

**Additional Resources:** Check out these great books for parents and children as you make your preparations for the new arrival:

- *The New Baby at Your House* by Joanna Cole
- *What to Expect the First Year* by Heidi Murkoff, Arlene Eisenberg and Sandee Hathaway, B.S.N.
- *What to Expect When the New Baby Comes Home* by Heidi Murkoff
- *How Do I Feel About Our New Baby* by Jen Green
- *Welcoming Your Second Baby* by Vicki Lansky
- *From One Child to Two: What to Expect, How to Cope, and How to Enjoy Your Growing Family* by Judy Dunn ✕

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