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*Dedicated to helping children with emotional and behavioral problems,
by developing stronger more positive family relationships*

Bringing a New Baby Into the Family

One of the more difficult situations for a young child to deal with is the arrival of a new child in the family. After all, the sibling has had Mommy and Daddy all to themselves, until now! They have been the center of attention without having to ask. It is not just the parents who have been giving this child so much attention, there are the grandparents, Aunts, Uncles and other family members. Why would any child want to add a little brother or sister who can't even play? It's no wonder that a child becomes aggressive, acts out, or regresses to behaviors of a much younger child.

So you are probably asking yourself "how do I help my child prepare for the arrival of the new baby?" You can start by preparing your child for the new baby before he or she is born. First, be sure that your child learns from you that you are going to have a baby. They like to hear about what it was like when they were babies, as well as see videos or pictures of themselves. Talk about how excited you were and how others wanted to hold you and help care for them. You could read them the book Will You Still Love Me? by Jean-Baptiste Baronian.

It is helpful to teach them about baby needs before the baby is born. Read age appropriate books about being pregnant, birth, and babies. Give your child the opportunity to ask questions. Talk about how the baby does not do much at first, except eat, sleep, poop, pee and cry. If you have a friend with a new baby, perhaps you and your child could care for the baby for a few hours. Children can practice holding, feeding, and changing a baby doll. You can decide together what things your child can help with when the baby comes home. Let them pick the coming home outfit from the selection of clothes you have for that event.



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The age of your child may have some bearing on how difficult the adjustment may be. Since a two-year-old or younger is still very much attached to the mother, it is more difficult for them to share Mommy. They still need sufficient time and closeness from their mother and father. After all, you are asking your child to share this new baby, not just any baby, but a baby that is staying and is taking away time you spent with them.

Once the baby arrives there are several things you can do to help your child adjust:

- Make sure you have “special time” with your child. This means uninterrupted time. It can be as short as 10 minutes a day, but it is very important that it be daily and with both mother and the father. Sometimes having “special time” in the mornings helps set the tone for the rest of the day.
- Allow your child to express their feelings about the new baby. These feelings may be negative at times, but they are probably how the child is feeling. Do not deny or discount your child’s feelings. This does not mean that it is okay to hurt the baby. Help your child learn other ways to express their feelings. Sometimes what they are really wanting is that special hug and acknowledgement that they are still loved.
- It is natural for your child to feel some jealousy when friends and family come with gifts and gush all over the baby. If your friend or family member does not bring a gift for your older child, you could have some available for them to give. The older child can feel pushed aside as the friends and family members fuss over the new baby. Be conscious of the fact that the older child



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will often feel left out when this happens, especially when they are expected to agree that this new baby is the best thing that has happened.

- Sometimes your child's behavior may regress and he/she may want to be treated like the baby. It is okay to indulge this. You can go so far as to pretend the child is a baby and can only do things a baby can do. Often if you treat the older child as a baby, they will often decide that it is really more fun to be older and be able to play.
- Giving your child some responsibility as the "helper" will make them feel important, to you, the baby and the family. Make sure that you only ask them to do things that are age appropriate.

Establishing a routine for you, the baby, and the older child will help everyone. If you are feeling overwhelmed and exhausted, don't be afraid to reach out to others. Some days are going to be easier than others. Sometimes it helps to focus on the week rather than on the day.

Relax and enjoy all your children for who they are! ■

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