

HELPING YOUR TODDLER PREPARE FOR AND BOND WITH A NEW BABY SIBLING

Written by Dr Kaylene Henderson, Child Psychiatrist

The birth of a new baby is often a very exciting time for parents, but toddlers find it difficult to comprehend that their family is about to change.

Here are some tips for helping your toddler prepare for the arrival of a new baby sibling...

1. Encourage bonding with your 'listening belly':

Just as you will start to bond with your baby even before his/her birth, so too can your toddler. Let your toddler know that his soon-to-arrive sibling can already hear him, even from inside your belly. This provides wonderful opportunities for interaction when you're chatting, reading or listening to music with your toddler e.g. "Your big brother and I are just about to read a book now baby. You'll be able to listen to it from inside my tummy and when you come out, we'll be able to show you the pictures too" or, "I wonder if you like this song - your big sister picked this one for us all to listen to".

2. Read stories about new baby siblings:

There are quite a few books which have been written to help prepare toddlers for the birth of new baby siblings. A popular choice is "I'm a Big Sister" and "I'm a Big Brother" by Joanna Cole.



In this story, the author explains that babies ask for what they need by crying. It can be very reassuring for empathic toddlers to understand that babies

are simply communicating in this way and are not necessarily sad.

3. Look at your toddler's baby photos together:

It can be helpful to make a little book for your toddler a few months before his new baby sibling is expected. In it, you can place photos of your hospital stay together when he was born, of being kissed and cuddled by family members and visitors and of using all the baby 'equipment' such as capsules, slings and bassinets. You can explain to your toddler that he enjoyed these when he was a baby and it will soon be your new baby's turn.

... And some tips for encouraging a loving sibling bond after the arrival of your new baby.

4. Your hospital stay:

Children can find your hospital stay to be a confusing and upsetting time but there are things that you can do to reduce the impact of your separation. Video-calls or face-time on your mobile phone can enable you to still connect with your toddler for good-mornings and good-nights. Packing quiet activities for your toddler to do in your hospital room with you (such as colouring in pages or puzzles) can also be helpful.

5. Be prepared for newborn gifts:

People are often incredibly generous when you have a baby but toddlers can often feel left out. Either store the baby's gifts away and open them once your toddler is in bed at night or have a small supply of pre-wrapped gifts that you're happy to bring out for your toddler if he seems to be struggling with all the baby gifts.

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6. Encourage your toddler to help:

There are lots of ways that you can include your toddler in your baby's care that can make him feel valued and helpful, e.g. "Which do you think would be a better outfit for your baby brother today - this one or that one? Thanks for helping". And, if you have a particularly helpful toddler at home, he can certainly assist by passing you nappies, wipes, or joining you as you gently massage your baby together.

7. Don't complain (within earshot of your toddler):

This is a huge change and your toddler is monitoring everything you say and do to help him inform his own attitude towards this change. If you want your toddler to THINK positively about your baby, you'll need to consciously SPEAK positively about your baby.

8. Spend quality time apart and all together:

It's important for you and your partner to spend 1:1 time with each of your children. But it's also important that you spend quality time with your toddler and baby together. A wonderful activity during this early stage is "smiling practice". Explain to your toddler that babies need to learn everything - they even need to learn how to smile! Then, when your baby is happily awake, you and your toddler can spend time gazing at your baby and smiling. Your toddler will feel proud and delighted when your baby finally smiles back. Another great tip is that when you're enjoying special time with your toddler, ensure that you save his very favourite activities for when the baby is with you both. That way your toddler doesn't start to look forward to the times when your baby is not around.

9. Managing feeding time:

A helpful idea for managing feeding time is putting together a box of 'special feeding activities' that are only brought out during your baby's feed time. This can include some new books, little toys or puzzles. If your toddler enjoys books, feeding time is the perfect time to have your child cuddle into your side while your baby feeds on the other, enjoying a book together.



To find out more about Dr Kaylene Henderson and her popular resources, go to: www.drkaylenehenderson.com. Or to download her online Advice Packs on a range of topics such as anxiety, resilience, school readiness and tantrums, head to A Dose of Awesomeness: www.adoseofawesomeness.com.