

Second baby

Parent Easy Guide 08



A new baby arriving in the family brings big changes for everyone. It can be a stressful time for young children, especially toddlers.

- > Toddlers don't have a strong sense of security. They may feel less loved when you spend time with the new baby.
- > Helping your toddler to feel loved and secure will make things easier for everyone.
- > Tell your toddler about the new baby, but not too soon – it's a long time for them to wait!

A second baby

Young children often misbehave when a new baby is on the way, or has arrived in the family. They may not know how else to tell you they feel worried or left out.

You can help your toddler to feel loved and secure through your actions e.g. by giving them hugs and smiles and by spending special time with them.

Before baby arrives

Tell your toddler about the new baby, but not too soon. They don't understand weeks and months and it can be a long time for them to wait. Tell them later in the pregnancy when they can see what is happening.

If there will be changes for your toddler, make them well before baby arrives. They are less likely to feel displaced. If they will move from a cot to a bed, make sure they see it as something special for them – not that you've taken their cot for the baby!

Tell your toddler what will happen when the baby arrives. Involve them in planning for the baby if they want to. You could:

- > ask their opinion if you are happy to agree with their choice e.g. between two baby outfits you like;
- > give your toddler a doll as their 'baby'. They may like to do the same things as you do for the real baby;
- > plan ahead for mother's stay in hospital. Your toddler will cope best if they stay at home with people they know well e.g. father, grandparent, or other trusted adult. If they have to go somewhere else or be with someone they don't know well, help them get used to it before the baby is due.

Try to reduce stress around the time of the baby's arrival e.g. avoid toilet training unless your toddler clearly wants to. Learning to use the toilet is a big task for a young child.

When mother is in hospital

Let your toddler visit mother and baby in hospital as much as you can. Even if they cry when they leave, it's better to see mother and know where she is. It can help to:

- > make your toddler feel special when they visit. Tell them you're happy to see them. It may help if mother is not holding or feeding baby when they arrive;
- > take photos of your toddler with the baby to show this is their family and it's a special time;
- > give your toddler something of mother's to mind while she's away e.g. a favourite scarf or handbag. This will help them understand that mother is coming back. They may like to have a photo of mother to hold too;
- > give your toddler 'a present from baby'. Your toddler may like to choose one for baby too.

If they are not able to visit mother, phone calls can help.

**Help your toddler to feel secure.
Make sure they know you will still
love them when the new baby arrives.**



When baby comes home

Expect your toddler's behaviour to change when the baby comes home, even if they are well prepared. Having a new baby at home can take everyone time to get used to. Try to spend time just with your toddler every day if you can. You may need others to care for your baby while you do this.

- > Your toddler may go back to younger behaviour e.g. wanting a bottle, wanting you to dress them, going backwards in toilet training. Let them do this for a while without comment. It will help them feel better sooner.
- > Your toddler may show other signs of stress such as tantrums e.g. when you are feeding baby. Let them know you understand how they feel. You could say 'I know you feel upset when I'm feeding baby and you want to play. I like playing with you too'.
- > Have special activities you can do together while baby feeds e.g. read a book together, watch a special DVD, or tell them stories about when they were a baby. Some children like to have a doll they can 'feed' too.
- > Read you toddler books about new babies showing the older child both happy and sad about the new baby.
- > Show your toddler how to touch baby gently. Always be there to make sure baby is safe. If your toddler hits baby, remove them from the situation. Say something like 'You are feeling very cross, but we don't hit'. Don't let them hit you either. Teach them that hitting is not how to show angry feelings.
- > Some parents miss the relationship they had with their toddler before the baby arrived. Being aware of these feelings and giving yourself time to adjust may help you understand more about your toddler's feelings.

Expect your toddler's behaviour to change when the baby comes home. Show that you understand how they feel. Try to spend special time with them every day if you can.

Want more information?

Child and Family Health Centres:

Phone 1300 733 606 9am–4.30pm Mon–Fri
For an appointment at your local Centre

Parent Helpline: Phone 1300 364 100

For advice on child development and parenting

www.cyh.com

For information on child health and parenting

www.parenting.sa.gov.au

For more Parent Easy Guides e.g.

'Living with toddlers', 'Families that work well', 'Growing and learning in the family', 'Sibling rivalry', 'Tantrums' and parent groups in your local area

www.raisingchildren.net.au

For information on raising children

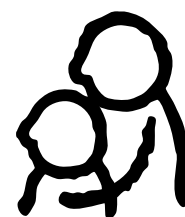
Parenting SA
Women's and Children's Health Network
Telephone (08) 8303 1660
www.parenting.sa.gov.au

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Parent Easy Guides are free in South Australia

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