



Second baby

A new baby arriving in the family brings big changes for everyone, particularly for your other child. The birth of a new baby is one of the most stressful times in a young child's life, especially if your other child is two or under (a toddler). As your toddler has not yet formed a strong inner sense of security and as there is always less of your time available when a new baby arrives, your toddler can feel less loved.

If you can keep your relationship with your toddler going well at this time it will make his life and your life easier. It will also help to build his self-esteem and confidence.

*This PEG uses 'he' and 'she' in turn.
Change to suit your child's sex.*

What parents can do

When there are behaviour problems with preschool children it is always worth thinking about whether there is, or is about to be, a new baby in the family. Children will often misbehave to get your attention and don't know how to tell you they feel left out.

Before the baby arrives

- Don't tell a very young child too soon about the new baby. It is exciting for you, but your child will not have a very clear understanding of what is to happen. Toddlers don't have an understanding of time and how long an hour, a week or a month really is. In a toddler's life, six months or so is a very long time to be waiting for something to happen. It may be a third of her lifetime, so for an adult it would be like waiting over twenty years!
- Tell your child later in the pregnancy when she can see what is happening. You can then involve her in visits to the doctor and helping to plan for the baby.
- She might like to help choose baby clothes, for example. Only ask for her help when you are willing to let her have a real choice. You could give her a choice between two baby outfits that you like, or between baby baths of two colours that you would be willing to buy.
- Some toddlers, both boys and girls, enjoy having a doll as their 'baby' and making the same sort of preparations as you do for the real baby.
- Don't change your toddler from a cot to a bed too close to the birth. (She may think you are taking her cot for the baby.) If you are going to make bed or bedroom changes do it a long time before the baby is born. Then the toddler will see it as something special for her, rather than for the baby.
- Don't try to toilet train your toddler around the time of the birth unless the toddler makes it very clear that she wants to use the toilet or potty. It is never helpful to have in your mind that you want to have your toddler using the toilet before the birth of the baby. Learning to use the toilet is a big task for a young child. The feeling of pressure that comes from you having a date in your mind is likely to set your child back rather than help. When the baby arrives she will see that the baby does poo in the nappy and that you seem to be quite happy about that and she will wonder why she has to be different.
- Plan ahead for the mother's stay in hospital as well. Your toddler will manage best if she can stay in her own home with the people she knows well. This is likely to be her father, a grandparent or a very close friend or relative. If she has to go to a different place, or to be cared for by someone she does not know well, help her to gradually get used to the new person or situation beforehand.

When mother is in hospital

- Your toddler will be helped if he can have as much contact with his mother as possible. Even if he cries when he has to leave it is better for him to know where his mother is and to see her. It is also helpful if you can make him feel special during visits and for his mother not to be holding or nursing the baby but able to spend time with him.
- Many toddlers are helped by having a postcard from their mother arrive in the post. Some also get comfort from minding something for their mother while she is away, for example the car keys.
- Let your toddler have a photo of his mother to keep.
- Sometimes a present from the baby to big brother or sister helps. Your toddler might also like to choose a gift for the baby.

When the new baby comes home

- Expect some change to your toddler's behaviour no matter how well prepared he has been. After all, it is a bit like your partner bringing home a new woman or man to share in your life. When the reality hits it can take some time to get used to, especially if the baby seems to be getting better treatment!
- Your toddler may go back to younger behaviour for a while, eg want a bottle, want you to dress him, or go backwards in his toilet training. (Letting your toddler act younger for a while, without getting cross, will help him to feel better more quickly.)
- You may find some misbehaviour or other signs of stress such as tantrums, especially when you are feeding your baby. Toddlers need to know that you understand these feelings. For example you could say: *"I know you feel cross when I am feeding the baby and you want to play. I would like to play with you too. I love playing with you. Can you find a book and we will read it together?"*
- Arrange special activities for your toddler that you keep for when you feed the baby, eg a doll that he can feed, a special video to watch, or tell him a story about what you did with him when he was a baby or read to him.

- Read stories about new babies which show the older child feeling both happy and sad about the new baby.
- Show your toddler how to touch the baby gently, but always be there to make sure the baby is safe.
- Let your child know that hurting the baby is not allowed. If he hits the baby, remove him from the situation with words such as *"You are feeling very cross, but we don't hit"*. Don't let your child hit you either, this is very scary for children and you need to teach them that hitting is not the way to show angry feelings.
- Make a special time for your toddler every day, no matter how small. Spend time with your toddler and get someone else to mind the baby sometimes. Show your toddler that you enjoy being with him.

Reminders

- **A new baby will make a big impact on your child's life.**
- **Toddlers learn to feel secure and loved from actions, such as hugs, loving touches and smiles and most of all from you spending time with them.**
- **Notice the good things that your toddler does.**
- **Try to make a special time for your toddler every day if possible.**
- **Let others care for baby while you spend time with your child.**

Want more information?

Parenting SA - www.parenting.sa.gov.au

(parenting and child health information) - www.cyh.com

Written in Partnership

Parenting SA
Centre for Parenting

Produced by

Parenting SA - telephone (08) 8303 1660
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Revised 0407

Parent Helpline
1300 364 100



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