

Second baby



A new baby arriving in the family brings big changes for everyone. It can be very exciting for toddlers and young children but involve some stresses as well. Toddlers don't have a strong sense of security and may feel less loved when you spend time with the new baby. Making sure your toddler feels loved and secure will make things easier for everyone.

A second baby

Toddlers and young children often feel left out and insecure when a new baby is on the way or has arrived in the family.

They may not know how to tell you they feel upset or worried about the attention the new baby is getting and may show it in their behaviour. This is normal for young children. It doesn't make them bad, naughty or selfish.

Giving your toddler hugs, saying you love them and spending special time together will help them to feel loved and secure.

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 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!

Include your toddler in planning for the baby if they want to. You could:

- involve them in getting the baby's cot or room ready
- ask their opinion if you are happy to go with their choice e.g. between two baby outfits you like

- give them a doll as their 'baby'. They may like to do the same things as you do for the real baby
- tell your toddler what will happen when the baby arrives so they know what to expect. Say these things several times.

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

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.

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, especially the first time
- 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.

Making sure your toddler feels loved when there is a new baby helps them adjust and sets the foundation for a positive relationship with their brother or sister.



When baby comes home

Expect your toddler's behaviour to change when the baby comes home, even if they are well prepared. Changes may go on for some weeks and this can be challenging when you are also managing a new-born. Your toddler may:

- go back to younger behaviour e.g. want a bottle, want you to dress them, go backwards in toilet training. Let them do this for a while without comment. It will help them feel better sooner
- show other signs of stress, e.g. tantrums 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'.

It can help to:

- spend special time just with your toddler every day if you can. You may need others to care for baby while you do this. Other family members can give your toddler special time too.
- have special activities to do together while baby feeds e.g. read a book, 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. You could have some special toys which only come out when you are feeding the baby
- read your 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 supervise.

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. Don't feel discouraged if this behaviour continues for some time. You are doing the right thing by persevering and being consistent. This can be hard when you are getting less sleep and are very busy with the new baby.

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.

Having a new baby at home can take everyone time to get used to, especially toddlers. Showing toddlers that you understand how they feel will make a big difference.

Want more information?

Parent Helpline

Phone 1300 364 100

For advice on child development and parenting

Child and Family Health Service (CaFHS)

Phone 1300 733 606, 9am-4.30pm, Mon-Fri for an appointment. See www.cyh.com for information on child health and parenting

Parenting SA

For more Parent Easy Guides including 'Sibling rivalry', 'Living with toddlers', 'Time in: guiding children's behaviour' and 'Tantrums' www.parenting.sa.gov.au

Raising Children Network

For information on raising children, including helping toddlers adjust to a new baby www.raisingchildren.net.au



Government of
South Australia

Parenting SA

A partnership between the Department for Education and Child Development and the Women's and Children's Health Network.

Ph: 08 8303 1660

www.parenting.sa.gov.au

Parent Easy Guides are free in South Australia.

Important: This information is not intended to replace advice from a qualified practitioner.

© Government of South Australia.
Revised:11/2015.