



A new sibling

helping children to adapt

A mixture of positive and negative feelings and behaviors is common in children when a new brother or sister arrives. Here are ideas based on current research that can help promote good sibling relations.

Timing Plays a Part

Parents often consider timing when they are planning a new child. Some experts believe that children between 18 months and three years old have the hardest time adjusting to new siblings. Children under 18 months may have fewer problems because they don't realize how life is changing for them. Four- and five-year-olds have more mature social and cognitive skills, so they can handle frustrating situations better than three-year-olds can.

Prepare Children for Change

It's important to prepare children for a new child. Most parents read books about new babies to their children. Parents may also introduce their children to newborns when they have the opportunity, and they may talk about what a new baby can and cannot do. If the family is adding an older child through adoption or foster care, the same sorts of activities will help children prepare.

It's Only Temporary!

Some children regress in their behavior when a new child arrives. Children may be more demanding, have more toilet accidents, or they may have trouble sleeping. These symptoms disappear in three to five months. Many children show signs of greater maturity when a new sibling arrives. They may take pride in showing that they are different from their little brother or sister because they can dress themselves. This is a great chance to praise children for helping in a stressful situation.

It's Not Just Luck When Kids Get Along

Good sibling relationship is more likely if parents value it. Parents should think about the way they would like their children to behave with each other. Then they should help their children learn to behave that way. If parents value closeness and affection between siblings, they should look for examples of this behavior to praise. Parents should model the behavior they want to see in their children. They should avoid behavior that they don't want their children to imitate.

Help your Child Learn How To Be a Sibling

Help your children find a role to play with their new sibling. Possible roles include assistant caregiver, teacher, helper, or playmate. As assistant caregiver, a child could fetch diapers, help entertain the infant, or help decide what the baby needs or is trying to express. Don't push children into a caregiving role, though, if they don't want it. Help the child find a different role to play, or wait until the baby is older and the children can interact together more successfully.

One Last Piece of Advice

Babies seem to come into the world ready to adore their older siblings. Make sure your older children know how important they are to their brother or sister. It will give them a sense of pride and foster mutual enjoyment.