

What to do now, during pregnancy

Read books about babies and tell stories about when your older child was a baby. Pull out baby pictures that show what life was like when your older child was a newborn.

Connect with families who have a child the same age as yours AND a new baby.

Change any behaviors or routines at least 3-4 months before baby arrives. If you have less than 1 month, then wait, if possible, until 3-4 months after baby arrives to make major changes to your older child's routine.

Help your older child(ren) deepen relationships with adults other than mom, and increase the amount of time the child(ren) receive care from partner, dad, other family members, and friends.

We always referred to "our baby" or "your baby" to the kids to let them know that it was a whole family change.) *JD, mother to 4, 6 and 8 year olds.*

Pack a special bag for your older child with the toys, lovies and snacks that you know will help provide comfort while you're gone. Older children can be involved with deciding what goes into the bag.

Older children can help decide what toys and clothing items his/her brother/sister will inherit.

Involve very young children (under 3) in the pregnancy in ways that make sense to them. Follow their lead for how much information they want and do not force participation.

Decide if your older child (older than 3) will be involved at the birth. If so, choose a care provider whose sole job is to take care of your older child. Prepare your older child thoroughly with videos, attending prenatal appointments, and talking with them about what they'll see, hear and smell.

When we had the ultrasound to tell us the sex we had the tech tell our son so he could tell us. After the birth, we did not allow any visitors until our son had a private meet and greet which included him holding new baby and watching mom care for the new baby. *LY, mother to 8 and 2 year old boys*

Provide dolls, slings and nursing pillows for your toddler to "practice" the behaviors he'll see in a few months.

Practice sleeping over at friends' or grandparent's homes in preparation for the big day.

Consider having a party for your older child as a way of celebrating their new status of big brother or sister.

We were very honest with her about what was to come. Mommy is going to have to hold the baby all the time and spend a lot of time feeding the baby (then I would show her pictures of me holding her when she was a baby and we would talk about how special babies are and how they need to be held and fed, etc) We included her in everything, let her make choices for things we were getting for baby, took her to a sibling adjustment class and had her at the birth. We had a nursing box full of surprises and even though she didn't get to peek inside till after brother came, she got to go hog wild decorating the outside and of course we had cake! We would sneak out and leave baby with dad and go get cake and somehow that sweet treat kept our relationship sweet. Having that special thing that only the two of us did really helped. I also reminded her and myself and all others involved that "It's a love thing that is going on around here...please act accordingly". That was my mantra and I'm sticking by it and I think it's working. *LS, mother to 3 and 7 year olds.*

What to do during the first days and weeks at home.

As much as possible, avoid changing day-to-day routines for your older children. The consistency and reliability of a daily routine helps younger children maintain some sense of normalcy and equilibrium.

Set non-negotiable boundaries for safe behavior around infants.

Follow your older child's lead and let them tell you how much they'd like to be involved in baby's daily care.

For younger children (under 3), attention equals love. Help insure visitors to your home listen to your older child and acknowledge her needs for sharing and expressing experiences.

We had a sign on the door that reminded people to address our older children first. The older kids were prepped to introduce the/our baby. We also had extra 'big brother' gifts on hand in case anyone came to the house with a baby gift but nothing for the big guys. We did lots of reading beforehand about what it would be like with a new baby in the house and made sure that we carved out one on one time everyday for each kid. *LL, mother to 3 boys, 1, 5 & 7*

Teach your older child newborn cues, capabilities, and reflexes to increase the "cool factor" of a newborn infant.

"Baby" your older child, if that's what they seem to crave. This may help stave off regression in areas less acceptable to you.

I used the term "our" a lot. Every morning I said say hello to our new baby. I wanted them to know that we share the love in our home. To think that we are all connected to each other. Love is not a commodity. *TT mother to 4 children, ages 4 - 12*

What to do during the first months

Never deny your child's feelings. Actively listen to your older child's concerns and complaints. Be patient and continue to follow his/lead as the entire family adjusts.

Resist the urge to expect your older child to suddenly become more independent after the new sibling arrives.

Make sure your older child has some special, private space and things and toys of their own that they don't have to share with their younger sibling.

Point out the benefits of being an older child, like choosing what to eat, being able to play at the park, and having friends.

Samantha and I do "snuggle time" in her bed 10-15 minutes each night after lights out. We started this as the only reliable 1-on-1 time we had each day, and we've been doing it for 2 years now! It's a great time to hang out in the dark, be silly, share secrets, and she knows it's a safe time for her to let her hair down about all the stresses and challenges of being a big sister and growing up in the big wide world. I would recommend it to all parents with a preschooler who are expecting a new baby. *MS, mother to two girls, ages 2 & 6*

Create special one-on-one time between your older child and each parent at least several times a week.

Expect periods of equilibrium and disequilibrium. When your younger child is going through a developmental growth spurt, expect to see some disequilibrium or regressive behavior in your older child.

Reward and enforce the positive behaviors you want to see in your older child.