

How can we help our daughter (aged 3 years) to adjust to having a younger brother and how do we ensure both children get enough attention?

Bringing a new baby home to the family can be very stressful for everyone! Even fathers can have difficulty adjusting to the relative lack of attention when a newborn arrives. Toddlers do not understand that the baby is now a permanent fixture and will not be sent back when the novelty has worn off. If you are expecting, make sure that you involve the older sibling in the pregnancy. She may not comprehend all that is going on but it helps to talk about the new baby brother and she can listen to his heart beat or look at the ultrasound at clinic visits. Look at your daughter's baby pictures and talk about what she was like as a new baby. Allow her to be involved in discussions about the baby's name. You need to tell your daughter that you are going to hospital to have the new baby. Tell her how long you expect to be away. Organise for her to be with close relatives or friends so that she feels safe and secure whilst you are away. When you bring the baby home from hospital, let your child know how important she is now that she is a big sister. Give her lots of praise for helping or sharing with the new baby. Tell her how much the baby loves her and that she is very special. The new baby needs to get into a routine as soon as possible. Your daughter will certainly become jealous or resentful if you spend all day feeding and cuddling the newborn. The baby can be quickly established on 4 hourly feeds and should be sleeping well in his cot as soon as possible. When the baby is in his cot, it is important to spend quality one-on-one time with your daughter. You may want to use feed time to read your daughter a favourite story or have a special toy that she can play with whilst you feed the baby. Allow her to help you to settle the baby. She can come and kiss the baby goodnight and help to put the baby in the cot. Do not expect your toddler to wait outside the room whilst you settle the baby. It is important to make individual time for both children. Your first child had your undivided attention for 3 years and will crave some special time. Your second child is blessed to have not only your attention but also the attention of a loving older sibling. The more children in the family, the less individual attention each child can receive from the parents but this is balanced by the love and interaction from other siblings.