



sibling rivalry



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Becoming an older brother or sister can be a confusing time for toddlers and preschoolers. Sibling rivalry is often identified when a toddler or preschooler starts to have one or all of the following behaviours:

- Attention seeking – eg shouting, interrupting, throwing toys
- Aggressive behaviour – eg hitting, biting
- Regressive behaviour – eg clinging, wetting their pants when they had been toilet trained for many months.

It is almost impossible for a toddler and some preschoolers to understand they are having a new brother or sister until it actually happens.

REMEMBER: sibling rivalry is a normal reaction to a new baby. The severity of the behaviour often depends on your toddler's temperament.



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Some potential sibling rivalry behaviours

- tantrums, anger and aggression
- whingeing
- refusing to use the toilet, wanting to use a bottle or nappies
- losing interest in activities once enjoyed
- ignoring the new baby
- behaviour seems too good to be true or their behaviour is unbelievably difficult
- more demanding
- being withdrawn and more clingy – not want to play with friends or go to preschool
- waking up in the middle of the night
- wanting to get into bed with you

Things to prepare your toddler or preschooler for the arrival of a new baby

- Find opportunities for your toddler or preschooler to have contact with very young babies
- Read books about babies or play with baby dolls
- Take your toddler and preschooler to antenatal visits
- Let your toddler or preschooler help organize the baby's bed and other equipment
- If your toddler or preschooler will be going to regular or occasional child care it is helpful to start this prior to the birth of your baby
- Encourage the carer to provide short periods of care before the baby is due, if this is not already happening. This will familiarize both the older child and the carer

- Avoid telling them about the baby a month or so before the baby is due, toddlers and preschoolers don't like to wait for exciting things to happen.

Things that may reduce sibling rivalry

- Let your toddler or preschooler know when you're going to hospital. Even though it is hard, wake them don't just disappear. Sleep problems can start if the young child wakes and finds their parents have gone to hospital
- While you are in hospital, if possible, your older child should be cared for in their own home.
- At the hospital visits be ready to give your older child a cuddle and all your attention before introducing them to the new baby.
- Even if your older child becomes upset when they have to leave you it is important that they continue to come for visits while you are in hospital
- Have a gift from the newborn baby to give to the older sibling.
- Ask the older child to guess what her new brother or sister is feeling: is the baby hungry? or happy? or cold? This helps the older child to understand that this new arrival also has feelings.
- When you need to attend to the baby for lengthy periods ensure you know where your other child is and what they are doing – having a box of special toys or refreshments for them during this time can help
- Keep on reassuring your older child that there is enough love to go around, even though you now have to share your time.

- Offer your older child regular (even if brief) periods of close bodily contact, like hugs and cuddles.
- Remember that toddlers and some preschoolers find it hard to wait. Don't always delay giving your toddler or preschooler some attention until the new baby is asleep.
- Remember that when a new baby arrives your older child can be confused and unprepared for the higher expectations that seem to be placed on them overnight.
- Reinforce positive behaviour by praising
- Involve your older child in caring for the baby eg fetching things, have supervised play periods
- Have a special uninterrupted time for each child
- Ensure both parents are consistent in using family rules
- Set limits and try to have a daily routine so that your older child feels safe and knows what to expect
- If you make promises ensure that you provide what you promised
- Remind people there are 2 children not just the baby – a sign on the front door can be helpful
- End each day on a positive note with the older child – focus on a positive behaviour displayed during the day, e.g. you played really quietly today

REMEMBER EACH CHILD IS AN INDIVIDUAL AND DEVELOPS AT THEIR OWN PACE.

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For further assistance:

- Visit either your local child and family health nurse or doctor
- Call Tresillian Parent's Help Line on (02) 9787 0855 or 1800 637 357 (Freecall outside Sydney)
- Contact a Tresillian Nurse on-line at Tresillian Live Advice by visiting our website at www.tresillian.net