

Introducing a newborn baby to a toddler sibling and how to deal with jealousy and potential dangers

“It is of quite particular interest, however, to observe the behavior of small children up to the age of two or three or a little older towards their younger brothers or sisters. Here, for instance, was a child who had so far been the only one; and now he was told that the stork had brought a new baby. He looked the new arrival up and down and then declared decisively: The stork can take him away again!” - S. Freud

Well, we have to understand that it is not easy for a toddler to accept losing exclusivity and accommodating for the new arrival. It is a feeling that is natural to some extent, which is why this subject has been neglected for centuries. However, in recent years there has been lots of interest in this topic, as it is important to tackle this problem as early as possible to save older siblings from the long-term adverse effects.

It is now well-known that the reaction of an older sibling during first few days is a most important indicator of long-term relationship between them. Each child is unique, and so are the reactions to the newcomer, and thankfully in most cases, this jealousy is not a big problem for parents. Nevertheless, in a small number of cases, it may become a serious issue.

Thus, the best strategy is to be knowledgeable and prepared for it.

Signs of jealousy

- Older sibling tries to get more attention of parents, either by talking more to parents or over-reacting
- Changes in the mood of toddler, the older child may cry more often or may show less happiness
- Behavioral problems like toddler becoming aggressive
- Decrease in affection and responsiveness to the mother
- Toddler may take more time in falling asleep and may cry more often in nights
- Violence or harming a younger one is rare, but something that asks for urgent advice from professional
- Smaller changes like asking for a bottle which toddler has not been using since long, or sitting in a place of younger brother or sister

Preparing toddler for the newcomer

- Tell the toddler that he or she can soon expect a brother or a sister, and though it may not be easy, but you can tell the older one about benefits, like having someone to play with.

- Tell him/her in advance about the changes that are going to come, as the older one may go to a nursery. At the same time, assure the older one that he or she is unique, and nobody is going to be like him/her.
- Involve the toddler in preparations of a newcomer, take the toddler along when buying clothes or a crib, or when purchasing a bed for the older one.

Handling jealousy between siblings

Once the newborn has come home, try using these strategies.

- Involve the toddler in the day-to-day care of the newborn.
- Spend time with the toddler, and often ask for advice about the newborn, so that toddler feels engaged.
- Never compare the two children, as each child is unique.
- When toddler is playing with the younger one, be participative and encouraging, be the part of the play.
- Teach the older one about taking care of the newcomer.
- Make rules in the family, like using or playing with something turn by turn.

Of course, there will be difficult moments, some moments of conflict between the siblings, but if you take measures on time, use common sense, you would soon see the siblings being happy with each other.

About the author:

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Dr. Preet is a family physician, and he has been practicing medicine for last 15 years and often sees child injury in his day-to-day practice. He understands the traumatic effect of such injuries on the whole family. He is also a passionate writer.

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