

Sibling Coping with a New Baby

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When a new baby is born into the home some issues can arise with the older sibling. Typical reactions by the first child in a family include increased behavioural problems or regressive behaviour. A certain “jealousy” is often observed by the parents. The birth of a brother or sister must in their own self involve a major shift of a symbolic kind - a change in the conception of himself within the family and as a person. There can be for the parent a long felt helplessness about solving this sibling rivalry because:

- The parent cannot change the child’s feelings
- They cannot send the new baby back

The approach taken by parents will greatly enhance the inclusion of the new baby and the creation of an increased family unit.

Suggested Strategies

Each child is different and individual. It is important to gain information from the parents as to what characteristics their child displays. It is important to work closely with the parents. It is also important to gain an understanding from the parent as to what is the most important aspect of their child attending your service. The following strategies are just some examples which may be applied to support the child at this time of change. This list is only the start and it is dependant on a variety of factors such as environment, length of time child is in care, child’s interest, likes, dislikes and skills already achieved.

- A child will find it easier to accept the new baby if prepared for the new event in their life. Telling the child that they will have a new playmate and building up their expectations can only lead to an anti-climax – “that baby isn’t fun and doesn’t play my games”.
- Making changes to accommodate the new baby should not focus on the baby, e.g. if you make changes to the child’s room make the changes special for the child rather than focusing on the baby.
- Try to make time for the older child separate from the baby.
- Avoid demanding additional responsibility for the older child for the sake of the baby. This responsibility may prove too much and as a result the behaviour may swing from being caring to being immature and impulsive.
- Clarify what you expect of the older child. Have a steady influence on the older child by ensuring that your expectations for them do not change. Change in behaviour may result in the adult making allowances which creates uncertainty in the child.

- While it is important for children to learn to share, each child needs some space and toys of their own. Try and avoid making the older child share his most valued toys.
- Avoid blaming everything on the baby, e.g. we can't go to the park because the baby is sleeping, after I change the baby I will help you, you will have to wait until after I feed the baby".
- Acknowledge the older child's unspoken feelings. When the child knows that you are acknowledging their feelings it can lower the opportunity of inappropriate behaviour.

References:

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| Mackey G | "Brother & Sisters" ECA 2005 |
| Slee P | "Child Adolescent and Family Development" Harcourt Brace 1993 |

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