



When a New Baby Comes

Practica Program Newsletter June 2009



Your little boy is five years old (or three or four). This happy, pleasant, verbal little guy has been the center of everyone's attention. Grandma even calls him "the little king."

There is good news ahead. You and your husband are bursting with joy. Your son will soon have a little sister. You can't wait to share all the details with the big brother-to-be. Yet, you're not sure when or what to tell him. Finally, you get the courage.

"Jason," you exclaim excitedly, "I know you're going to love this good news. Mommy and Daddy are going to have a baby!"

You're enthusiastic, but alas Jason doesn't even seem to care. He leaves the room and runs to play on his swing set. You follow him to explain further. You continue to talk enthusiastically, and he seems bored. Finally, he asks when the baby's coming. You respond, "In April." Jason says, "April, that's far away. Is that after my birthday?"



Jason runs to the climbing bars, apparently totally unconcerned about the conversation.

Preschool children think concretely. They don't see a baby; the future is far away, and they're busy playing happily in, you hope, a secure world. Gradually, as the time gets nearer and the baby becomes more apparent, Jason will ask more questions and even become a little more interested.

Jason won't even notice as the baby increases in size. As you arrive at your last three months, you may wish to let Jason feel his baby brother or sister kicking. Most mothers refer to the baby as being in their "tummy" and that probably won't cause any real problems. A few weeks before the baby arrives, be sure to read some books about new brothers and sisters to your children. Let them help decorate the room and get things ready .

When the Big Day Arrives

When the new baby comes, the feeling and the questions are quite different, and the feelings children have aren't often expressed well. They always miss their mother when they go to the hospital, and when the baby comes home, they *always* miss parental attention. Although parents may feel tired after the new baby arrives at home, be sure that both Mom and Dad find some one-on-one time for the older siblings. Also, older children can have special tasks, like bringing diapers when you require them or bringing a toy to be placed in the baby's cradle or crib.

Many gifts will arrive for the new baby. You may worry about your older children feeling jealous. Sometimes friends will bring them a gift as well, but many won't. You can explain that to your older children by comparing it to a birthday. Little sister or brother won't get many gifts on Jason's birthday, either. Jason can help unwrap the baby's gifts and even thank the friends on behalf of the baby. Jason will like the idea of taking for the baby until the baby is old enough to talk on her own.

Family and friends will want to welcome the new baby and a great deal of company will be stopping by. There will be plenty of "The baby looks just like Grandma" comments. Conversation will center on the baby. Add a few positive comments about Jason from time to time.

Be sure to refer to the good big brother he's becoming. Tell the friends about how gentle and kind he is to his new sister. Hearing those comments about himself will encourage kindness and help him to share attention.

Symptoms of Sibling's Rivalry:

Some first children feel very jealous and express it immediately in mean or aggressive things they do to others and even to the baby. If indeed there are a few aggressive behaviors, be clear and firm that these aren't acceptable, but don't discuss with other adults the new negative behaviors within Jason's hearing, or you will see the behaviors increase. Sometimes older siblings regress and ask for baby toys and baby bottles. They may even wet their pants or their beds. More, however, seem content, happy and excited about the new baby and express their feelings of sibling rivalry much later, when the baby is a year old, begins walking, or, especially, when the baby is old enough to grab their toys. Eventually, children learn to share attention, but some sibling rivalry is natural.

Summary Advice

Read stories about new brothers and sisters a month before the baby comes.

Let older children help prepare for the baby's arrival.

Permit older children to choose a special gift for the baby.

Be sure to find special one-to-one time for older children.

Assign older children helping jobs and let them know you appreciate the help.

Don't focus all your conversation on the new baby.

Casually mention to other adults, within the older child's earshot, what a gentle big brother (sister) he (she) is.

If the older sibling is aggressive toward the baby, don't chat about it to other adults within your child's hearing.