AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

Welcoming a New Sibling: Strategies to Help Ease the Transition



Young children go through many, sometimes challenging, developmental phases. Magination Press's Big Little Talks series by Alberto Pellai, MD, PhD, and Barbara Tamborini, provide fun stories to ease both parents and children through typical and common life stages using empathic listening and encouraging an understanding of age-appropriate behavior and emotions.

Welcoming a new family member is a challenge for the whole family. Everyone has to learn to adjust and adapt! This adapted excerpt from the Reader's Note in the Big Little Talks book, *Oh Brother!* provides strategies for parents to help their preschooler adjust to the arrival of a new sibling.

Identify and Express Emotions. While young children may not understand their emotions, what they are often struggling with when a new sibling is on the way is the fear that sharing mom and dad means sharing their love. Your preschooler has very simple thoughts and may struggle to express their emotions in words. Parents can help them understand what they're feeling with simple phrases: "The new baby will be here soon; I can see that you're upset, and that's OK. Let's go on a nice run together and get rid of some of that energy you are feeling."

Prepare the Child for the Arrival of the Baby. The waiting period before the arrival of the new sibling is an important time to prepare your older child. Make them feel that they will be an important part of their new sibling's life. "We're going to need to get to know your new sibling. I will need your help to understand what things they like or don't like."

Ensure, Whenever Possible, Equality and Fairness. This is true our whole lives: the more parents are able to be fair and impartial with their children, the better the children will get along. This doesn't mean you should give everyone the same things: everyone is different and has individual needs. Being fair means taking the time to understand the needs and emotions of each child: acknowledge wrongs done, find solutions, console them, etc. A child of 3 or 4 should see that their pain is taken seriously by their parents. For example, if the younger child breaks something of the older sibling, don't trivialize it by

scolding them: "but she is little, don't get angry with her!" This response assumes that the child is old enough to empathize with their little sibling, but their brains really aren't quite there yet. Instead, find a solution, "Let's find a place where you can keep all your favorite things safe, so that your little sister doesn't ruin them."

Understand the Older Sibling's Needs. The firstborn may "regress," inventing care needs similar to those of the baby. Let them know that it's not wrong to ask for special attention, even if they have outgrown some of these care needs. If you allow them to play at being little for a while and enjoy some special attention, they will feel listened to and soon return to the world and doing "big kid" things.

This post is an adapted excerpt from the Reader's Note in *Oh Brother!*, a picture book exploring how it feels to have a younger sibling.

This Article's Authors

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