Helping your child adjust to a new sibling

Written by [BabyCenter Staff](https://www.babycenter.com/babycenter-editorial-team)

Updated December 2018

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## **How is my child likely to react to a new baby in the house?**

Even if he was excited about having a new sibling before the birth, your preschooler may change his mind once the new baby comes home. How your child behaves will depend partially on his temperament. Children who are more flexible and self-contained may adjust more easily. Those who are highly sensitive, need more time with transitions, and like routines may take longer to adjust.

Your firstborn may react to the addition of a new family member by testing you or [regressing](https://www.babycenter.com/0_parents-say-my-child-has-regressed-since-her-sibling-arrived_3636398.bc) (sitting in the baby's seat, wanting a diaper, or asking to drink from a bottle). He's likely to want your attention most when you're nursing or changing a diaper.

He may even try to express his feelings by yanking the baby's arm or snatching her toys. You can respond by saying something like, "I want you to be gentle with the baby. It can hurt her to pull on her arm. If you need to pull on something, you can pull your wagon." (See our piece on [aggression in preschoolers](https://www.babycenter.com/0_aggression-hitting-and-biting-ages-12-to-36-months_11550.bc) for more tips on dealing with this behavior.)

Most likely your child will also be eager to show his new sibling affection and connect with her. Read on for tips on how to help your preschooler accept and even enjoy the new baby in your lives.

## **What can I do to help my child accept a new sibling?**

**Give him special jobs.** Let your firstborn help out — he may surprise you with how much he can do. When you bathe the baby, he can help soap her legs. He will probably be happy to fetch diapers or a new set of clothes. When the baby cries, ask him to gently pat her back or talk softly to her. If he wants to hold his new sibling, have him sit in a chair with pillows on either side of him, then prop the baby in his lap and stay nearby to be sure all is well.

**Ask his advice.** Ask your preschooler: "Do you think the baby would like to wear the blue shirt or yellow shirt?" or "Do you want to help me tell a story?" Preschoolers often have a natural flair for entertainment — singing, dancing, or just making faces — and a baby is an appreciative audience. Not only will your child enjoy the attention, he's likely to take pride in bringing a smile to his sibling's face.

**Watch the baby together.** Invite your child to observe the baby with you. Hold him close and ask him to describe what he sees. "Look at her eyes. What are they doing? How does she hold her hands?" You can even do this while the baby is sleeping.

**Read stories about his new role.** Reading stories about the trials and joys of having a new sibling can help your preschooler adjust to his new situation. Books that feature children who resent the new baby in their lives can help him understand that his feelings are natural. Stories that show children enjoying and taking pride in their little sibs present positive role models for your child. Joanna Cole's gender-specific I'm a Big Sister and I'm a Big Brother are good places to start.

**Let him tell the story.** Have your child help make a simple picture book about him and his new sibling. Let him choose the pictures he'd like to have in the book and ask him what words he'd like on each page. He might even want to tell the story of her birth and their new relationship from her point of view.

**Acknowledge his feelings.** It's normal for your preschooler to feel a range of feelings about this new change in his family. After all, he suddenly has to share you with someone who requires an extraordinary amount of your time and attention. Rather than scolding him, acknowledge his feelings: "It seems like you're feeling sad right now. Do you want to tell me about it?" Or "Is it frustrating that sometimes when you want me to do something, I need to help the baby?" He may just need you to take some time to listen and hold him.

**Spend a little time alone with him.** Spend some time each day with just your older child, even if it's only a few minutes of drawing or building with blocks. This time makes him feel special and reminds him that you're his mommy as well as the baby's.

**Let him do his own thing.** If your preschooler doesn't want to be involved with the new baby, don't push it. A lot of kids cope with the change by "ignoring" their tiny siblings — at least for a while. So you don't need to expect him to play a greater role than he wants to. He'll come around in time.

Check out our collection of [Parents' Voices](https://www.babycenter.com/0_parents-say-how-can-we-prepare-our-child-for-a-sibling_3636401.bc) to see how other parents helped their older children adjust to a new baby in the family. See our piece on [solving sibling rivalry](https://www.babycenter.com/0_growing-a-family-a-parents-guide-to-helping-siblings-bond_1745805.bc) for more tips on helping your children bond.

NOTE: This piece was reviewed by Janis Keyser, parenting educator, co-author of Becoming the Parent You Want to Be, and a member of the [BabyCenter Medical Advisory Board](https://www.babycenter.com/prkit-advisoryboard).