



Bringing Baby Home:

Tips for Introducing an Older Sibling to a Newborn Brother or Sister

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During July, Americans celebrate Independence Day and the birth of our nation. However, many families will also celebrate a birth of a different kind – the arrival of a new baby. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, mothers deliver more babies in July than most any other month.

Families experience an enormous amount of change after the arrival of a new child. Perhaps no one will experience this change more than an older sibling. In fact, many families will face the task of introducing older children to their new siblings as an estimated 60 percent of pregnant women are not first-time moms, according to a U.S. Census Bureau report.

Fortunately, you can prepare before and after the baby's birth to help create a positive family environment for both children. First 5 Yuba offers the following steps to help ease your family's transition and encourage a healthy and happy sibling relationship from the start.

Before the New Baby's Arrival

Begin discussing your pregnancy once it becomes evident to your child, or as soon as you feel comfortable. Waiting to discuss the baby's arrival with your older child often leads to increased jealousy.

- **Have a "baby talk:"** Talk to your child about the baby, encouraging him or her to touch your stomach and ask questions. If you know the baby's gender and name, begin calling the baby by this name to help your child understand that the baby is growing inside you.
- **Get your older child involved:** Involve your older child in preparing the baby's room. Allow your child to choose certain things for the nursery such as the room's color or a new toy for the baby. Make sure your child feels included in preparing for the baby.
- **Emphasize your child's big brother or sister role:** Make sure he or she understands how special it is to be older and how he or she can help with the baby. Check out books from your local library about being a big brother or sister.
- **Consider pregnancy effects:** Be aware of how your pregnancy will affect certain routine activities with your child. For example, you may no longer be able to carry your child to bed. To avoid resentment, tell your child that your back or feet hurt rather than blaming it on the pregnancy (and therefore the new baby).
- **Share your child's baby history:** Show your child photos and tell stories about when he or she was a baby. This will help your child understand that he or she was once an infant just like his or her soon-to-be little brother or sister.

In the Hospital

When your first-born comes to visit you in the hospital after the baby is born, there is potential for the situation to overwhelm him or her. Help your child feel at ease by having a plan for making him or her continue to feel special.

In the Hospital, continued

- **Be hands-free at the hospital:** When your older child arrives, have another person hold the newborn. With your hands free, you'll be able to greet your older child. Remember, your older child is there to visit you, and seeing you with the new baby right away could cause confusion and anger.
- **Focus on the older child first:** After your older child spends time with you, then introduce him or her to the new baby.
- **Remind guests to visit with the older child:** Ask friends and family to greet your older child first before lining up to see the newborn. Also, have them talk about how fortunate the newborn is to have your older child as a big brother or sister.
- **Give a gift:** Consider giving your older child a gift to celebrate the baby's birth. For example, hide a doll or toy car under the baby's blanket for your older child to find.

At Home

Once you bring your newborn home, make efforts to be sensitive to your older child as her or she experiences and adapts to the changes in the family.

- **Ask for help:** Encourage your older child to help you care for the new baby. Ask him or her to choose the baby's clothes or help you with diapers when needed.
- **Encourage interaction:** Allow your older child to interact with the baby, playing with the baby's feet and hands instead of sensitive body parts such as the head. If your child is old enough, have him or her hold the baby while sitting down with adult supervision.
- **Share the love:** Remember that just as you need to show affection to your newborn, your older child is in need of love as well. Remember to kiss and hug your older child often to confirm his or her important place in the family.
- **Allow older child activities:** Remind your older child of the benefits of being a big brother or sister. Encourage your child to do "big boy" or "big girl" activities that the baby cannot do, such as riding a bike or playing with friends.
- **Dedicate special time:** Spend special time with your older child without the baby. Have a friend or family member care for the newborn, while your older child chooses an activity for you to do together.

First 5 Yuba encourages all parents to embrace their growing families with creativity and care. For more information on healthy family functioning, First 5 Yuba programs or to receive your free *Kit for New Parents*, call (530) 749-4877 or visit www.first5yuba.org.

About First 5 Yuba

Research shows that a child's brain develops most dramatically in the first five years and what parents and caregivers do during these years to support their child's growth will have a meaningful impact throughout life. Based on this research, California voters passed Proposition 10 in 1998, adding a 50 cents-per-pack tax on cigarettes to support programs for expectant parents and children ages 0 to 5. First 5 Yuba distributes approximately \$1 million a year in Prop. 10 revenues to programs and services that meet local needs.