

Second baby



A new baby in the family brings big changes for everyone. It can be very exciting for toddlers and young children but involve some stresses as well.

Children can feel left out and less loved when you spend time with the new baby. Putting extra effort into making sure they feel loved and secure will make things easier for everyone.

Children and feelings

Toddlers and young children do not have a strong sense of security. They can easily feel upset or worried about the attention the new baby is getting.

They may not be able to tell you how they feel and can show it in their behaviour. This is normal. It does not make them naughty or selfish.

Giving children lots of hugs, telling them you love them and spending special time together can help them feel secure and loved.

Before baby arrives

- Tell your child about the baby but not too soon. They don't understand weeks and months and it can be a long time to wait.
- Tell them what's happening in simple ways they can understand – whether their mother or other person is having a baby, or the baby is coming into the family some other way.
- If there is a pregnancy, you could tell them later when they can see the 'baby bump'. Let them touch it or feel baby kicking if you are comfortable with this.
- Involve them in getting ready for the baby if they want to, eg preparing baby's room or cot or choosing between two baby outfits you like.

- If there will be changes for your child, make these well before baby arrives. If they will move from a cot to a bed, make sure they see it as something special for them – not that you have taken their cot for the baby.
- Try to reduce stress around the time of baby's arrival. Avoid toilet training unless your toddler clearly wants to do this. It is a big task for a young child.
- If they have to go somewhere else while mum is in hospital or be with someone they don't know well, help them get used to this before the baby is due.
- Tell them what will happen when baby arrives home so they know what to expect. You will need to say this many times.

When children feel loved and secure it helps them adjust and sets the foundation for a positive relationship with their new brother or sister.





- Take your child to visit mum and baby in hospital as much as you can. Even if they cry when they leave, it's better to see mum and know where she is.
- Make them feel special when they visit. Let them know you are very happy they are there. It may help if mum is not holding or feeding baby when they arrive, especially the first time.
- If they can't visit for any reason, phone and video calls can help. Some toddlers like to have a photo of mum or something of hers to mind while she is away.

When baby comes home

Expect your child's behaviour to change when baby comes home, even if they are well prepared.

Toddlers may:

- go back to younger behaviour, eg go backwards in toilet training, want you to dress them or want to go back to a way of feeding they have been weaned from, such as a bottle. Let them do this for a while without comment. It will help them feel better sooner
- show other signs of stress, such as tantrums, especially when you are feeding baby. Let them know you understand how they feel. You could say 'I know you feel upset when I'm feeding baby and you want to play. I like playing with you too'. You could have special activities to do together while baby feeds, eg read a book, watch a movie, play with special toys or tell them stories about when they were a baby. Some children like to have a doll they can 'feed' too.

If your toddler hits the baby, remove them from the situation. Say something like 'I know you're feeling upset/angry, but we don't hit'. Don't let them hit you either. Teach them that hitting is not how to show angry feelings.

It can help to:

- reassure them of your love. Spend special time just with them every day if you can. Other family members can do this too
- be patient and consistent. This can be challenging when you are getting less sleep and are busy with the baby
- read them books about new babies showing the older child both happy and sad about the baby
- show your toddler how to gently touch, hold or play with baby. Always be there to supervise.

Some parents miss the relationship they had with their toddler or other children before the baby arrived. Being aware of these feelings and giving yourself time to adjust can help you understand more about your child's feelings.

A new baby can take everyone time to get used to. Showing children that you understand how they feel will make a big difference.

Want more information?

Parent Helpline

Phone 1300 364 100

For advice on child development and parenting

Child and Family Health Service (CaFHS)

Phone 1300 733 606, 9am-4.30pm, Mon-Fri for an appointment. See www.cafhs.sa.gov.au for information on child health and development

Perinatal Anxiety and Depression Australia – PANDA

Phone 1300 726 306

Support for women, men and families affected by anxiety or depression during pregnancy and the first year of parenthood www.panda.org.au

Beyond Blue

Phone 1300 224 636

Information and support to help everyone achieve their best possible mental health www.beyondblue.org.au

Raising Children Network

For information on raising children, including helping toddlers adjust to a new baby www.raisingchildren.net.au

Parenting SA

For more Parent Easy Guides including 'Children and learning about sexuality', 'Donor conception: telling your child', 'Sibling rivalry', 'Living with toddlers', 'Time in: guiding children's behaviour' and 'Tantrums' www.parenting.sa.gov.au



**Government of
South Australia**

Parenting SA

A partnership between the Department of Human Services and the Women's and Children's Health Network.

Ph: 08 8303 1660

www.parenting.sa.gov.au

Parent Easy Guides are free in South Australia.

Important: This information is not intended to replace advice from a qualified practitioner.

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