

## SINGLETON SIBLINGS

Most children have some difficulty in adjusting to the birth of a newborn brother or sister. For older siblings of multiples, this transition can be especially hard since they must accept the arrival of two or more babies in their home. They are no longer the center of attention and their parents are often too exhausted to play with them. Also, family members and friends usually make a fuss about the multiples when they visit while ignoring the older sibling. It's only natural that the older brother or sister will feel some amount of jealousy and resentment towards the new babies.

Parents can help their older child through this difficult phase by laying the foundation in advance for the arrival of newborn siblings. Listed below are some suggestions on how parents can prepare the older sibling during the pregnancy period:

- Introduce the concept of multiples and let them see ultrasound pictures of the babies if possible.
- Validate your child's concerns and reassure them that they will still be loved once the babies arrive.
- Involve the older sibling in purchasing baby items by allowing them to select clothes and toys for the new arrivals.
- Purchase baby dolls or stuffed animals which represent their new siblings so that they can play act and get comfortable with their new role as a big brother or sister.
- Expose the sibling to newborns by letting them interact with a friend or family member's baby. This may answer some of their questions about what it's like to have a baby in the house.
- Reminisce about the time when they were babies by looking at videos and photo albums. Try to make them understand how much time you spent with them when they were small and that babies need a lot of extra care.

Once the multiples are born, parents may also need to take some of the following steps to help the older sibling adjust:

- Make a big deal out of the sibling's new role as a helper and how great it is to be a big boy or girl. Let them help out with the babies' bath and by fetching diapers or clothes.
- Spend some uninterrupted time with the older child each day while the babies are napping. This may be easier said than done for busy Moms especially if they are breast feeding their infants. If Mom is totally unavailable, Dad could take the older sibling on special outings and spend some quality time with him or her.
- Many children show signs of regressive behavior such as bed wetting, nail biting, or thumb sucking. This is a common reaction to the birth of new siblings and will typically go away once the dust has settled.
- Include siblings in photo sessions when taking pictures of the new babies and give them a copy of their own photo which they can display.
- Draw attention to the older child when in public so that they don't feel ignored since strangers will most likely focus on the multiples.
- Keep gifts on hand for the older sibling which can be used when visitors shower the multiples with presents.
- Allow children to vent their anger in appropriate ways and encourage them to talk about their frustrations. Let them know that you can empathize with them and sometimes feel overwhelmed, too.

In some families, multiples are the older siblings and they must deal with the birth of a new brother or sister. Most of the suggestions listed above would also apply in this situation since parents must adequately prepare each child for the changes brought about by the arrival of a newborn. Even though multiples are used to sharing their parents with each other, they may have a difficult time adjusting to their parents' preoccupation with a new baby.

It may also be difficult for the younger singleton sibling to be born into an environment where older multiples exist and share a close bond. They may feel excluded as they grow older and suffer from feelings of isolation. In order to avoid this scenario, parents need to encourage their

multiples to interact with the younger sibling and develop a separate relationship with them. However, it's only natural for older children to prefer playing on their own at times and to resent the intrusion of younger siblings. Parents should try to arrange play dates for the younger child with his or her peers so that they have the opportunity to form close friendships with someone their own age.

Singletons need to be reassured of their special status in the family, regardless of whether they are the older or younger sibling. The role of a singleton sibling should be treated with the same importance as the multiple's position in the family. Problems can be prevented if parents are sensitive to their children's needs while providing them with individual love and attention.

Sources:

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