



Sibling Rivalry



Welcoming your new baby into your home is an exciting moment but it also represents a tumultuous and emotional change for your toddler ...

By KAREN DOHERTY & GEORGIA COLERIDGE

It is an important moment when siblings first meet. More than anything you want your family to be happy and for your children to get on well from the start. But it may not be so easy. As one mother told us: 'When my son came in and met the baby, the first thing he said was, 'Get rid of her. Send her back!' I was heartbroken.'

Though it may be luck of the draw and down to your child's temperament, there are lots of things you can do to ease the transition. It helps if you remember that your older child is used to being your baby. So when you see him for the first time after the birth, try to make him the focus of your attention. Ask your partner or the grandparents to hold the baby so you can greet him and give him a cuddle. If you have been away, he is sure to have missed you. There are going to be endless times when the baby will need your lap, and your older child will have no choice but to learn to share you. But just for these first few moments, try to give him as much attention as you always have.

Once you have held the baby, your older child, though still only little himself, will suddenly seem like a giant in comparison. Young children are hardly known for delicacy, so when he touches the baby, it can easily seem like he is manhandling her. You can so easily fall into the trap of reprimanding him, which might cause him to resent the baby and feel persecuted by you. It's much better if you can try to keep some perspective.

'When my husband brought my son to hospital to meet his sister, we handled it so badly. Within moments, we found ourselves criticising his every move. 'Don't do that,' 'Careful how you ...' 'No, no, NO!' We realised that if we

carried on like that, we'd probably ruin their relationship. So, instead, we let him touch her and play with her. He tried to clap her hands together, he tickled her feet and he squeezed her here and there. But they both seemed happy. We decided from then on only to intervene if we had to.'

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Instead of being critical, it is so much more helpful if you try to compliment your older child as much as you possibly can. If you focus on telling him all the things he is doing right, there is far more chance he will start seeing himself as a good older sibling, and start to enjoy his new role.

'When my daughter met her younger brother, I could tell she was a bit unsure of herself. I wanted to help her feel more confident, so I told her what a

nice big sister she was for touching the baby so gently. Then she pulled up his blanket, and I thanked her and said he must really appreciate that. Next thing I know, I saw a little smile on her face as she looked at him.'

There is no reason to stop complimenting your child after the two of them first meet. Keep it up – permanently. It is one of the best ways to keep sibling rivalry at bay. The more your older child feels appreciated, the happier he will be and the less chance there is that jealousy will start building up. Try making lots of positive comments about him so he can overhear you.

'When India was born, my sweet, lovely Connor got incredibly jealous. He became so horrible and nasty toward his little sister. One day, when I was changing her nappy, I started saying nice things about him so he could overhear me. I said, 'You're so lucky to have Connor as a big brother. It has been a bit hard for him since you have been born because he is used to having Mummy all to himself. But he's such a good big brother and you are very lucky to have him.' I was amazed! Immediately Connor went and got India two toys to play with. I told him what a good big brother he was and how kind he was to share his toys. After about three weeks of this, all of Connor's animosity had disappeared. He still brings toys for India to play with and says, 'Connor kind.'

You may be reading this in hindsight and wish you had done things differently, especially if your children are not getting on that well. But it is worth remembering how you handled it when they first met may not even be a factor. What matters is what you do in the months and years ahead to help them get on better.