

## Family additions

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THE ARRIVAL OF A NEW BABY HERALDS A SIGNIFICANT CHANGE IN ANY FAMILY HOUSEHOLD. FOR PARENTS WHO ALREADY HAVE CHILDREN IT IS A TIME TO HELP FOSTER A NEW FAMILY RELATIONSHIP.

Children can be very excited about a new baby brother or sister, lovingly looking after them and rushing to tell you when baby cries, or helping with nappy changing and bath time. However sometimes children can be jealous and aggressive toward a new baby.

Children may react to the arrival of a baby with babyish behaviour themselves, disobedience, tantrums, moodiness, clinginess, or problems with bedtime, toileting or meals. To avoid problems, it is best to prepare your children for a new baby at least 3 to 4 months in advance.

A good place to start is to talk about what to expect when baby comes home. Describe to your child what they were like as a baby and show them pictures.

Remember though not to tell your child you are adding to your family so that they will have a friend to play with. Your child will be very disappointed with a playmate who sleeps most of the time and can't even hold their own toys!

Of course if your children are older, be prepared for lots of questions about where exactly the baby is going to come from. A prior visit to a good book store for appropriate age information on sexuality and childbirth can be well worth it.

Where changes to household routines are necessary, such as moving your child from a cot to a bed or into another bedroom, these should be done well in advance. Avoid giving your child the impression they are being displaced by the baby by saying things such as "You're a big girl now so it's time for you to sleep in a big girl's bed."

No matter what steps you take before the birth of a new baby, don't be too concerned if your child is unwilling to hug or cuddle you when you are first reunited at home — they will mix with you and baby when they are ready. Just be available to hug and kiss your child and give them some undivided attention.

It also helps to use your baby's name when encouraging young sisters or brothers to help or interact with you and baby. This will help your children realise that the baby is a person just like them, rather than a 'thing' that has been brought home.

When problems do occur, it is likely due to your child feeling left out. While some quality time may help adjust the balance it is important not to accidentally reward undesirable behaviour by giving too much attention to babyish behaviours such as thumb sucking or wanting to wear a nappy. Don't punish your child if they slip back a little from developmental achievements, instead give lots of praise and encouragement when they behave well.

Of course if any serious misbehaviour occurs such as hurting the baby, parents must act quickly to let children know that such behaviour is unacceptable.

Remember too, know matter how well behaved your child is toward their new baby brother or sister it is a good idea to make sure they have a place to play uninterrupted away from the baby each day.

**Parenting Tip:** To avoid your child feeling guilty about any negative feelings they might have for their new baby brother or sister, make sure you acknowledge those feelings in a constructive way. If your child says they do not like the baby, you might agree that it is not always fun to have a baby in the house. You could talk about how you love the baby but also find some things hard, such as getting up in the middle of the night.

**Find more parenting tips at: [manitoba.ca/triplep](http://manitoba.ca/triplep) or call 945-4777 in Winnipeg or toll-free 1-877-945-4777.**

Professor Matt Sanders is founder of the Triple P - Positive Parenting Program.