

- **Teach and encourage** cooperative play and turn-taking.
- **Be realistic** – fighting is normal!

If you would like further help in managing a new arrival, then speak to your GP or Health Visitor. You can also contact First Steps directly, who are here to help;

For more information, help, and advice, please contact:

**First Steps**  
**Early Intervention & Community Psychology Service**

Hackney Ark  
Downs Park Road  
London E8 2FP  
Tel: 020 7014 7135  
Fax: 020 7014 7251

Further information is also available at:

<http://www.understandingchildhood.net/>  
<http://www.zerotothree.org/>

**If you have any issues or concerns please contact:**

Patient Advice and Liaison Service  
(PALS): 020 8510 7315/7728

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Clinical Psychologists  
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## Helping children to deal with a new arrival

An information leaflet for parents



*Incorporating hospital and community health services, teaching and research*



Based on our knowledge and experience of working with families, this leaflet aims to help parents support children to deal with the arrival of a new baby in to the family.

### Reactions to a new baby

Common reactions to the birth of a new sibling are:

- becoming more demanding
- becoming more clingy
- temporarily losing skills (e.g. toileting or feeding).

Mixed reactions are also a natural part of a child's adjustment. e.g. A toddler may enjoy cuddling the baby one moment and the next, be seen trying to hit them.

The new sibling can also generate difficult feelings for parents:

- Some parents find they relive their own experiences of sibling relationships, which influences their parenting.
- Parents often develop preferences for one child over another, especially where there is more demanding behaviour. This can lead to guilt and overcompensation.

### Practical tips

- Prepare children for the new sibling.
  - During the pregnancy start talking about the baby and changes in a realistic way (e.g. the new baby cries, sleeps, and largely ignores them for the first few months).
  - It may seem an ideal time to send your eldest child to nursery but try to arrange it so it doesn't exactly coincide with the birth or you may find they feel resentful.
- Once the baby is born the message to try to get across is: *"If your child's behaviour changes, they are not a bad person for feeling cross or jealous."* Reading stories

together about new siblings or talking about your child's feelings will help the child know that you understand.

- Be firm about undesirable negative behaviour (e.g. hitting). Give them a clear idea about what is not acceptable.
- Try to phrase things positively though: e.g. "kiss gently" rather than "don't touch". Often the child may not have learnt more appropriate ways of interacting at this stage.
- Also, try not to make a big deal out of babyish or regressive behaviour (e.g. wanting a bottle) - it should pass.
- It is a reality that you will have less time for the older child. However, it is important to arrange some special 'baby-free' time with them - even if this is only five minutes a day.
- Children often enjoy helping to look after the baby – give them small manageable tasks, and praise any signs of interest.  
BUT - be careful not to insist on their co-operation.

### Later on – the older child

- **As the younger child grows** and poses more of a threat to the older one's toys, you can expect many squabbles. Try to ignore the more minor squabbles – remove the "audience factor"!
- **Sometimes you may need to intervene** – calmly remove the toy that's causing the trouble. Then get them both involved in something else.
- **Remember you can never treat children exactly the same**, they are separate individuals with different interests and experiences.
- **Teach consequences.** It may be a waste of time trying to find out "Who did it?" but involve all in clearing up.
- **Be aware of your own behaviour and language**, if you use 'mine' and 'yours' a lot your children will too.