



Supporting the birth that is right for you!

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Preparing Children for the Birth of a Sibling

By Rebecca Pugh

- Involve the child in your prenatal care: let them accompany you to a few prenatales, meet the midwife, and better understand the pregnancy process. They can listen to heart tones, touch and feel the mother's belly, and be a "helper" to you and the midwife. This will demystify the coming baby and help the child connect to the baby.
- Name the baby, even if it is a nickname, and encourage singing and talking to the baby. Explain that the baby can hear your voice and will recognize its' brother or sister when it is born.
- Explain the role of the child when the baby comes: Mother will need help and so will baby. "Now you are a "big brother" and will need to help out and teach the new baby".
- Decide if you will have the child present at the birth: this involves another level of preparation, as the child will need to know what to expect at the birth. Mother will be working hard and will be in pain sometimes, she may make loud or unsettling noises and make expressions of anguish or great pleasure. There will be blood, especially during the birth of the placenta, and fluids. All of these situations should be explained according to the age of the child. Books and videos can be extremely helpful with this. A child who is attending a birth should have an adult companion who can leave with the child if necessary and mediate the experience, especially if some emergency should arise. If the child will not be at the birth, plan ahead for childcare to be readily available. Make a plan for transportation, where the child will be, and when you want her to return.
- Plan something special for the child around the time of the birth. Maybe a very special grandma is coming to visit who can plan special activities for the child and her. Extra attention for the child is always helpful, as the focus can easily rest on the newborn and the sibling feels neglected. A "birthday gift" for the new baby is fun to make, but don't forget to have a gift for the child that the new baby "gives" to her new sibling!
- Prepare your child for the logistical aspects of a new baby: maybe they will soon share a room, or the child will have to sleep in a "big bed" to allow the crib for the baby, you could be weaning your first child now (prepare for regression when the older child sees the baby nursing). If you prepare now, there will be less conflict at the time of the baby's arrival.
- Remember that this is the last time you will have an "only child", so make the most of it. Plan a lot of quality time as a family and you will be so glad you did.

