

Welcoming a Second Child to Your Family

by Heidi Behrends

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The joy of a second child is often tempered by the anxiety and uncertainty of bringing another life in the balance of family dynamics. Will the second child be an intruder in the family, competing for attention and love? Is it disloyal to the firstborn to force a sibling on her? Will there be enough love for both? To ensure that a second baby is welcomed by siblings, parents must lay the groundwork during pregnancy. Here are some suggested activities:

- Talk to your child about pregnancy and birth. Find out what he already knows, correct misconceptions and answer questions. Use appropriate terms. The baby is in the "uterus" not "stomach." However, avoid overwhelming a young child with too much information.
- Read books to your child about pregnancy, birth, new babies and feelings about being a big brother or sister.
- Bring your child to a prenatal visit to meet your doctor or midwife.
- Let your child hear the baby's heartbeat and feel the baby move. Talk about fetal development with your child, explaining what abilities the fetus has.
- Practice prenatal exercise with your child. Explain that these exercises help you feel better during pregnancy and afterwards.
- Help your child make a picture book about pregnancy, birth, big brothers and sisters and families.
- Show your child photographs of her as a newborn.
- Have your child interact with a friend's baby. Let him see how small and sometimes playfulness a baby is.
- Have your child help you pack your suitcase or the baby's bag

for the hospital.

- Make changes in room or sleeping arrangements several months before the birth to prevent your child from feeling displaced. Set up the new baby's sleeping area to give your child time to get accustomed to where the new baby will be.
- During the last weeks of pregnancy, let your child know you'll be leaving to go to the hospital for the birth. When labor begins, tell her when you are leaving and where you are going. Your child will be less anxious if she knows your plans for her care and is familiar with the person who will care for her during your absence.
- Attend a sibling preparation class. Sacred Heart Medical Center and McKenzie-Willamette Medical Center offer one to families. For more information and to pre-register, call 686-7074 (Sacred Heart) or 741-4649 (McKenzie-Willamette).

Once the new baby arrives, the constant presence of a helpless crying newborn who requires almost constant care may be traumatic for big brother or sister. The firstborn may experience meltdown; returning to outgrown behavior such as thumb-sucking, wanting a pacifier, feeding from a bottle or breast, or wetting his pants. He may also show excessive preoccupation with the baby, aggression toward baby or parents, and changes in eating and sleeping patterns. Try not to be disappointed in your child. Accept the behavior as a normal reaction and work from there. The following suggestions also may help ease your child's adjustment to the new baby in the family.

- Give your child a doll so she has a "baby" to care for.
- Plan for chime alone with your older child to do what he wants.
- Have a birthday party after the birth with cake for all.
- Give a gift to your older child while you're still in the hospital or when you're at home.
- When visitors bring presents for the baby, your older child

may feel left out. It may help to have her open them, have special treats ready or delay opening them until she is not around.

- Include your child in baby-care activities that he wants to help with and that are appropriate for his age.
- Allow your child to have nothing to do with the baby if that is what she wants.
- Read or talk to, plan an activity with, or provide a snack for your older child while feeding the baby.
- Avoid statements like, "You have a new playmate," or "You're going to love the baby," when these are not very likely to occur.
- Tell the baby about the older brother or sister while he or she is with you and listening.

Take care of yourself. Try to rest when possible. This may not decrease your child's resentment or jealousy, but you'll be able to cope better.