

SECOND BABY

The coming of the second child is a very different experience for all parents. Usually the whole process seems much less stressful because we have been down the road before. However, there is one person for whom the event will cause dramatic increase in stress - THE FIRST CHILD!

The question of child spacing often arises. An important concern is how another baby will affect THE FIRST CHILD. If we agree with the developmental and early-child experts who feel that the first three years of childhood are very important for establishing self-esteem or self-value, then it would be ideal for the second baby to join our family sometime after these three years pass. A recent study in Utah has also shown that mothers who have less than three years between pregnancies have a higher chance of a premature birth. Spacing the second baby more than five years apart typically interferes with a close sibling relationship and creates another "first-child". When it is possible then, it would appear that somewhere around a three-year spacing is preferable.

Before the second child arrives we will begin to notice that THE FIRST CHILD perceives that things are going to change, even if we never mention it. Children have an amazing ability to sense what we are feeling emotionally. We can do several things to help with the transition:

1. Continue to refer to THE FIRST CHILD by his given name. Being called "The Big Sister" is a label. We are giving it to someone who cannot reason and really understand what it means and what the job requires. It could easily be perceived as meaning that we didn't like our child's given name, so we gave her a new one. It creates a situation in which we are setting the rules for our children's relationship and not allowing them to develop their own.
2. If we really believe that they should develop their own relationship, we will strengthen that process by acting like it makes no difference to us how THE FIRST CHILD feels about the second. Saying "You love your brother, don't you" is about telling siblings that they must like each other to make us happy. CHILDREN ARE NOT IN CHARGE OF PARENT'S HAPPINESS!
3. Depending on the spacing and sexes of the children, THE FIRST CHILD may attempt to interfere with feeding because of feeling "acute lack of attention". Girls tend to be more interested in caring for babies, while most boys would rather have a truck than a sibling. If it is an issue, it is often helpful to have THE FIRST CHILD be in their room with a gate and mommy can sit right outside the gate to feed the baby. This allows the mother to talk to the older sibling and know where he is without interference with the feeding process.
4. Since most first children have at least 4 or 5 times too much

stuff (toys, etc.), we can ask people who come to see the baby to not bring more stuff for THE FIRST CHILD. Rather they can bring "the gift of time" and spend time with the older sibling, thus respecting his importance and value for being "first".

We should expect that the coming of the second baby will create stress for our first. There is also value in the effect that this stress will have on THE FIRST CHILD. First children receive an abnormal amount of attention, especially if they are also the first grandchild. Being the center of too many people's world is a hard place to be. Having someone to share the pressure is a benefit of having a sibling - they take off some of the heat! And they are someone to play with and argue with and share life and toys with. But these are all things that siblings learn as life progresses and we need to expect THE FIRST CHILD to "act his age" when the second baby arrives. We will, therefore, expect to see him act like a baby at times (not because he is regressing, but because he sees what is getting all the attention he used to get). He may do things which we have never seen before to command attention. He does not know anything about the safety of the baby, so we must always be close when they are together to remind him about "gentle".

Remember, THE FIRST CHILD will not be behaving badly, he will be ACTING HIS AGE in the given situation.

Regarding the second baby, we have noticed some common behavioral differences both initially and in later months:

1. Second babies seem to sleep a lot more during the day than the previous baby, probably because of two reasons. First they come home to a much busier household with the activity of the older sibling. Second, they have been in a busier, more noisy place in utero than with the first pregnancy.
2. If the second baby does have an evening fussy time, it most often seems to happen after the older sibling goes to bed. This is not the ideal time, because we are tired and would like to "hit the hay" as soon as we can.
3. We often worry about not having as much one-on-one time with the second baby, but as it will become clear over time, this is probably a benefit to the second child and not a negative.
4. Because we have already seen most of the new things that the second baby does, we tend to not act like we care as much. This lack of attention has a very positive effect in the second child's life, in that they perceive that they need to "care less" about other people's happiness. They seem to care very little about what other people think and have very strong opinions. This is the blessing of being second!