

Preparing Children for a New Baby

A baby brings to your home joy, excitement and readjustment for each family member—most significantly, for the older children involved. No matter how well older children are prepared for the birth or how eagerly they anticipate the baby, feelings of jealousy, concern over space and objects, and worries over a parent's love and attention inevitably arise.

Understandably, most parents want their older children to accept and love the new baby. Parents may see jealousy as something to be avoided, and perhaps a sign that they have failed to prepare their first-born for the arrival of a sibling. Remember that some jealousy is inevitable. More importantly, it may even be desirable.

When children safely express jealousy, that may indicate that they feel their environment is safe enough to express what they know you don't want to hear—that they don't like the baby all of the time! At times, jealousy and its expression through anger, stubbornness, competition, hostility, aggression, harassment, regression and withdrawal appear and reappear in the life of a family. Even though this behavior is difficult or unpleasant to deal with, it's a sign that children feel safe in expressing their feelings.

Your task is not to eliminate expressions of jealousy, but to recognize its existence, understand your child's feelings, try to reduce the situations in which jealousy is expressed, and limit it to safe expression.

