

# Ten Tips: Preparing a Preschooler for Adopting a Sibling

By Jean MacLeod

- 1) Talk very honestly and *specifically* about what might change with a new baby in the house** (for example- "if we are reading a book and the baby cries we will need to finish our book later"), so that your child is prepared and won't feel so betrayed when/if a shift in your attention occurs. A three year old still won't be happy about sharing your time, but at least he or she will come to a situation with some understanding of the plan of action.
- 2) Talk about what all babies need and deserve** (food, sleep, dry diapers and lots of loving attention). Tell your child that's how you took care of him or her when he/she became your baby, and that's how you will take care of the new sister or brother.
- 3) Prepare your child for the attention from others that the new sibling will bring.** Inform your son or daughter that ALL babies tend to bring this kind of attention; it's just how people react to little ones (it's how people reacted to him/her, too), and it's just a normal baby thing! Praise your child specifically for handling all of the new baby-attention like a "big kid".
- 4) Talk about the positive changes that will occur from being a Big Sister or Brother.** A new big kid bike? A weekly park date with just mom or dad? Talk about how she or he will be able to teach the baby sister or brother lots of important skills. Encourage your child to designate some of his or her 'younger' toys for the baby, and together choose a safe storage for treasures that your older child doesn't wish to share.
- 5) Encourage regression.** Offer your child a baby bottle of chocolate milk and a chance to be held like a baby in your lap on a regular basis. Let him or her pretend babyhood. Offer tastes of baby food. Facilitate a bubble bath with your son or daughter and the new baby. If your child is new to potty training, expect a few training steps backward.
- 6) If your child likes baby dolls, buy one to give him or her while waiting for the sibling.** Demonstrate what babies need and how they like to be held; reinforce and reward careful handling!
- 7) Give your child two special jobs to do that are all his or hers:** one that helps *you* out (for instance, place baby bottles on the lower shelf in fridge so he or she can run and get one for you as needed), and one that he or she designs to make the baby happy.
- 8) Expect to do attachment work** (infant massage, parent-child bonding activities) on your preschooler for a period of time, in addition to meeting the new baby's bonding needs.
- 9) Use a hands-free baby carrier or sling so you can physically interact with your preschooler.** Holding hands anchors your connection to your oldest, while you carry your youngest. Three hand squeezes = I Love You!
- 10) Tell your child that he or she will *always* be your baby. XOXO**

