

Ask Nurse Rona: Preparing for Another Child

Rona Renner, RN for the Bay Area Discovery Museum

Is your family preparing for a second child? This month Nurse Rona Renner, host of the radio show *Childhood Matters* and the parenting expert for the Bay Area Discovery Museum, suggests ways to help a big sister or brother adjust to a new baby.

Q: *I have a two year old who is going to be a big sister in a few months. What can I do to prepare her for our new baby?*

A: There are many things you can do to prepare your daughter, but keep in mind the reality of another child will be a real surprise to her (and you). Accept that she's likely have various reactions once the baby is home, and she might even regress and want to have a bottle or try breastfeeding again. If she's potty trained she may have more frequent accidents. These things will pass with lots of hugs and one-on-one time with her while someone else holds the baby.

Some tips for big sister prep:

- Visit a friend who has a baby or look at babies at the park or in the store. Don't talk about having a new baby too early. Toddlers really don't have a good sense of time. Introduce the idea when your belly starts to grow, when she has questions, or when others are starting to talk about the new baby.
- Let your daughter help you pick out some clothes or supplies for the baby. She can get a shirt that says, "big sister." You can also buy her a baby doll to play with before or after the birth. Remind people who come to visit to not only talk about the baby, but to give your daughter attention too.
- Look at your daughter's baby pictures. Talk about how little she was and how she has grown. Tell her how you fed her and changed her diaper and comforted her when she cried.
- Read stories about new babies. There are many good books so ask the librarian for help to find appropriate books that fit with your values. Some suggestions are:
 - *Waiting for Baby* by Annie Kubler
 - *Mommy's Lap* by Ruth Horowitz
 - *The New Baby* by Mercer Mayer
 - *Baby Sister* by Tomie DePaola

Don't worry if your daughter tells you she doesn't want a new baby. Once she sees that you still pay attention to her and she can help out with the baby, she'll make the transition. Get as much rest and support as you can so you'll have the patience to help your daughter become a big sister.

This article was originally published as a column for the Bay Area Discovery Museum.