Helping kids cope with the new baby

**Older children can act out and show anger toward a new sibling**

Until now, your firstborn had you all to herself. So you’re probably not too surprised to find that she’s resentful and jealous of the new baby. But you may not have expected her to be angry. You may be taken aback by the many unacceptable ways she is finding to express hostility and get your attention.

According to Saralee Jamieson, MU Extension human development specialist, “Kids two-and-a-half and younger are capable of venting anger directly at the baby, so you’ll need to be watchful.” A toddler might say, “Take the baby back!” Your position, expressed without a threat, should be: “You don’t have to like the baby, but you can’t hurt her.” Be aware that a toddler may unintentionally handle the baby awkwardly. Be sure to distinguish between this and a deliberate attempt to cause pain.

Three-year-olds may respond by being mad at the baby and mad at you as well. Or a child may internalize her anger but take it out on the baby, with too-hard pats and squeezes and surreptitious pinches. If an older sibling returns to babyish habits, don’t punish this behavior. You may even indulge it occasionally by changing the older child’s clothes on the changing table or serving juice or water in a bottle.

Four- or five-year-olds may also feel rejected and unloved, but they operate on a more sophisticated level of awareness. Typical behaviors include demanding that you watch and admire her activities and lavishing affection on Dad while Mom is focused on the baby. Warning signs: consistently avoiding or ignoring the baby, being unable to show the baby any affection, being overly aggressive toward the baby, or behaving in a caring manner but experiencing nightmare and/or difficulty sleeping.

Once your infant becomes mobile, you’ll need to protect your older child’s possessions and “space” and, just as important, her place in the family. Here are some suggestions:

- Don’t make a big issue out of sharing. The concept of ownership and sharing is beyond the understanding of a child under age three. Give positive reinforcement to your child as she shows signs of learning how to share.
- Allow a toddler to enjoy some sense of control over the baby’s play. An older child will feel proud and grown-up if you ask her to choose some toys from her collection that the baby can play with.
- De-emphasize the older child’s role as “mother’s helper” after the first few months. Support and encourage the older child’s achievements that have nothing to do with the baby.
- Spend time alone with the older child. It will make a big difference.

**Teaching Gentleness**

Even before the baby is born, parents can teach gentleness to an older child by encouraging loving behavior with a pet, doll, or stuffed animal.

Show the child how to hold a baby, supporting the back and neck while you do the same with the baby. Reinforce gentle behavior by saying “I like the way you hold your baby sister so carefully,” or “hold her hand gently—that’s right.”

Be gentle yourself, with both children, your example will be the best teacher.

Studies have also found that when parents talked about the new baby as a person — “your brother or sister” — this was predictive of better sibling relations.

Overall, giving attention to your child before and after the birth is important. And remember to praise your child when she is gentle.

**MU Extension contributors:**

May Day gives families an opportunity to celebrate spring while they perform an act of kindness. Children traditionally leave May Day paper baskets filled with fresh flowers on doorknobs or porches of neighbors and loved ones. Then they run away and watch, giggling from a distance while their gifts of kindness are discovered.

Is there an elderly neighbor or a sick person in the neighborhood who would benefit the most from a basket filled with a healthy treat?

According to Susan Mills-Gray, MU Extension nutrition specialist, “Modeling positive, caring behavior is the most effective way to foster empathy in young children.” She encourages you to discuss how it feels when we help others and brainstorm kind acts that make others smile. You’ll need the following for your May Day basket project:

- tape, glue or a stapler
- paper
- scissors
- ruler
- pencil
- healthy treats to fill the baskets (for example: popcorn, dark chocolate, low-salt pretzels, mixed nuts, low-fat snack crackers, dried fruit)
- optional items: stickers, markers, crayons

Draw an eight-inch circle on a piece of paper. Cut out the circle and decorate with stickers, crayons or markers. Wrap into a cone shape that closes at the bottom. Tape, glue or staple the cone firmly into place. To make a handle, draw a one-inch by 11-inch rectangle on a piece of paper and cut it out. (Or use a piece of ribbon, which is stronger.) Place the handle across the top of the cone and secure it with tape, glue or staples. Line the basket with tissue paper if necessary to prevent unwrapped food from staining the paper. Fill with treats and deliver!

(Source: Tricia Masenthin of SheKnowsEducation; Meals without Squeals by Ellyn Satter)

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May Day basket traditions can help foster empathy in your young children

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Saving energy, saving money

As parents we want to provide the most comfortable but affordable home environment possible for our families. According to Marsha Alexander, MU Extension housing and environmental design specialist, there are strategies we can teach our kids that will result in significant energy savings year round. However, during the summer months there are specific things that we can do to save energy.

Check the temperature setting on the thermostat. Raising the temperature in the summer adds up quickly in energy savings. Each degree change, can save up to three percent on your home’s cooling costs. Programmable thermostats can save substantial dollars when used properly. When using air conditioning, use a ceiling fan to circulate the air. Turn it off when you leave the room. Close blinds, shades, or draperies to block the sunlight during the hottest part of the day. Installing awnings above windows that are exposed to direct light can provide extra energy savings.

When computers, electronic games, printers, TVs, and other appliances are not being used, they should be turned off or use a power strip to disconnect the units. When cell phones are fully charged, unplug them.

In the kitchen use the microwave or toaster oven instead of the regular oven when possible. Keeping lids on pots and pans can reduce cooking time. Don’t use more water than needed for cooking or boiling. The extra water will require additional energy to heat.

Turn off the lights when leaving a room. Provide tasks lights over desks and tables that will be used for homework and other jobs. These lights will reduce the need for general lighting for the entire room. Replace incandescent bulbs with compact fluorescent lamps (CFLs) or light emitting diodes (LEDs) when possible. Yes, they cost more to purchase, but will save you considerable energy dollars and lasts a long time.

There are many websites that are specifically designed for kids to learn more about energy savings.

For more information visit [http://www.energyhog.org/](http://www.energyhog.org/) which is sponsored by the Alliance to Save Energy or visit [http://extension.missouri.edu/](http://extension.missouri.edu/)