A week-by-week guide for parents

Making Room

A gentle, week-by-week plan for helping your toddler welcome a new baby, with fewer surprises and more connection.



For the weeks before birth and the first months together

Scripts | checklists | toddler printables

A note before you begin

Congratulations on your growing family.

If you're reading this, your family is about to grow, and you're already thinking about the little person who's about to become a big sibling. That's a lovely place to start.

It's natural to worry. Will they feel replaced? Will they be jealous? Will they be gentle? Nearly every parent expecting a second child asks these questions.

Here's the reassuring part: decades of research show that most toddlers adjust well. Some go through a bumpy patch, and a few need extra support. Almost all of them come through it, and the relationship that begins now can become one of the longest and most important of their lives.

This guide gives you a plan, the words to use, and the research behind them. Use what fits, skip what doesn't, and meet this change with more confidence and less guesswork.

There's room for everyone. Let's help them see it.



What the research says

Before the plan, the good news. Here's what decades of research on new siblings actually shows.

What the research says

82%

of American children under 18 live with at least one sibling. For most children, becoming a sibling is a normal part of growing up.

Dunifon, Fomby, and Musick, Demographic Research, 2017

What the research says

About half

of children's free time is spent with their siblings, once they have them. The sibling relationship is often the longest family relationship a person has.

Dunifon, Fomby, and Musick, 2017

What the research says

30 studies

reviewed together found no evidence that a new sibling is a crisis for most children. Reactions varied widely, from disruption, to no change, to real developmental growth.

Volling, Psychological Bulletin, 2012

What the research says

241 families

followed from pregnancy to the baby's first birthday. Most firstborns showed few problem behaviors and little change. Those who reacted with aggression often adapted quickly.

Volling and colleagues, Monographs of the SRCD, 2017

What this means for you

A rough patch is common and usually temporary. Your job isn't to prevent every big feeling. It's to prepare your toddler, stay connected, and respond calmly while they adjust.

What's inside

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How toddlers experience a new baby, and what's normal.

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A week-by-week plan for the months before the birth.

3 **The first meeting** 21
The first meeting and the first days home.

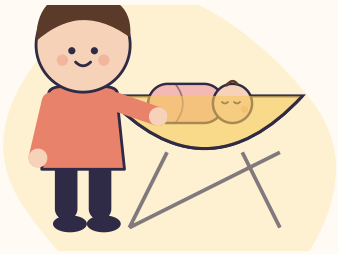
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Regression, jealousy, feeding time, and special time.

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Nurturing the sibling relationship as the baby grows.

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Cheat sheet, care plan, charts, big sibling book, and certificate.

Short on time?

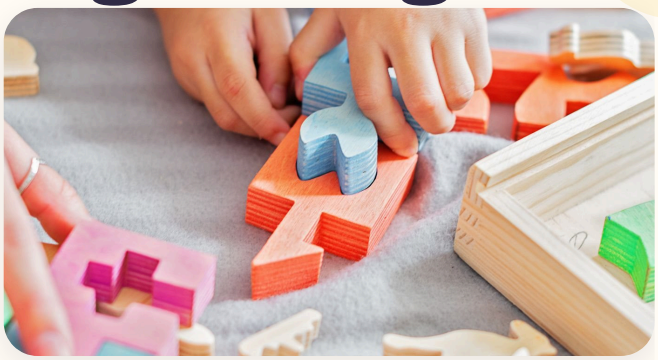
- Your 12-week countdown
- Planning the first meeting
- Daily special time
- Hitting and rough touch



Part 2 | 5-min read

Practice being a big sibling

- [ ] Practice with a baby doll: holding, gentle touch, feeding, diaper changes
- [ ] Read books about new babies and big siblings
- [ ] Look at your toddler's own baby photos and tell them stories
- [ ] Visit friends with babies, and point out what babies can and can't do
- [ ] Let them help choose some baby items
- [ ] Talk about what newborns are like: sleepy, noisy, and not ready to play yet



Set realistic expectations

Many toddlers imagine a playmate. Explain gently that the baby will mostly sleep, eat, and cry at first, and that playing together comes later.

During doll play

Gentle hands, just like that. You're going to be so good at this.

Looking at baby photos

This was you when you were brand new. You were so tiny, and we loved you so much.

Part 4 5-min read

Daily special time

Special time is 10 to 15 minutes of one-on-one time with your toddler, every day, where they lead the play. It's the most effective thing you can do to protect your relationship during this change.



How it works

1. **Name it.**
   Call it special time, or give it your own name.
2. **Set a timer.**
   It shows it's protected and predictable.
3. **Let them lead.**
   They choose the activity. You follow, describe, and enjoy.
4. **No phones, no baby.**
   Someone else holds the baby, or do it while the baby naps.

Why child-led?

When your toddler leads, they feel powerful and seen, which is exactly what can feel missing when a new baby arrives. Child-led play is a core part of several well-studied parenting programs.

Both parents

If there are two of you, each do your own special time. Toddlers often need extra connection with the parent who's busiest with the baby.