

## Preparing your child for the birth of a sibling

Since most siblings are spaced two to three years apart it seems that this column might not be a bad place to talk about how to prepare your toddler for the birth of a new sibling. Preparing for a new baby in the family may start with the “where do babies come from” question, generally an uncomfortable one for parents to tackle. An informal survey of the parents in my office revealed a mix of explanations, ranging from “God sent us your brother from heaven” to more complicated biological explanations, including body parts, hormones, and a detailed description of gestation. A single parent smiled and said “I couldn’t use the mommy- daddy marriage explanation since that wouldn’t have worked in my family, so I stuck to more scientific answers.” Joan Vitiello, married and mother of a 3 and half year old Matthew and two month old Nicole said that she helped her son prepare for the new baby by looking over old baby pictures. She realized that she had to rethink her approach when he asked “Did I come from play-doh?” So if you want to prepare your child for the new baby, here are some tips to keep in mind.

- + Your toddler is probably less interested in how the baby was conceived than by how it will come out. Children are very curious about body parts and functions at two, especially since many are being toilet trained at about this time. They often need us to explain that every function has it’s special place in the body , including a special, safe one for holding the baby while it grows.
- Don’t rush the process. Nine months is a very long time for young children and it is wise to not tell your child about a pregnancy until it is more obvious. Besides, early pregnancy loss is so difficult to explain to a young child that it is smarter to be cautious.
- Going over baby pictures with your toddler or preschooler is a great idea, and will be especially important after the new baby is born. Remember, for little ones, growing up means giving up some great pleasures, and being a big girl is not always fun. Being a baby, and having parents doting on you, will always sound great and pictures remind children that they too were adored the way the new baby is now.

Some families have special circumstances that require thoughtful statements to children. A complicated pregnancy requiring bed rest, or a long awaited successful adoption, may end in joyous rewards for a family, but you may still need to keep a careful eye on your toddler to see how she is handling it.