

# It's high noon when the new baby arrives

When a new baby arrives, parents often expect their other children to be just as excited as they are.

Sometimes this is the case, but with everyone doting on the new arrival it is not unusual for older children to feel left out, ignored or even abandoned.

For a first child under the age of five, the birth of a new brother or sister can be a challenge.

Until now, this child has been No.1, accustomed to Mum and Dad watching everything they did. Now they see their parents delight in this annoying little creature who can't do any of the exciting things *they* can. They have been replaced.

The ways in which parents deal with feelings of jealousy and competitiveness that older siblings may experience at this time can affect a child's relationship skills for the rest of their life.

Home is where we all learn about relating to other people. When the new baby comes home, parents should take special care to help the other children adjust to sharing their house, parents and eventually food, toys – and even their bedroom.

As the new baby grows, competitive battles can develop between children. Remember that a certain amount of sibling rivalry is healthy and a normal part of learning about relating with others.

But when parents are busy, tired or preoccupied, children can feel emotionally neglected.

The quickest and best way to get Mum or Dad's attention, even if it is negative attention, is to have a fight with a brother or sister. Parents then usually come running, asking who started the squabble.

Rather than trying to work out who is to blame, try to stay neutral and ask the children how they can work out their problem. If punishment seems necessary, send the children to their bedrooms or other quiet spaces away from each other, until they have calmed down.

Acknowledging children's feelings without judging them can help diffuse a fight. For example: "I can see that you are furious with your brother at the moment and I can see that you are very hurt."

Help your children to understand that feelings of frustration are normal, but that there are better ways than fighting to resolve a disagreement.

If you share your home with more than one child, be prepared for normal rivalry, and tell yourself this is an important learning experience about life for your children.

## Survival tips

- **Help your older child adjust to the arrival of a new baby. Make them feel special too, by giving them a new toy just for themselves.**
- **Involve them in looking after the new sibling. Allow them to cuddle the new baby, but don't force them – they will show interest in their own time.**

- **Get close during the baby's feeding time by reading them a story (if you have a spare hand) or by sitting together talking.**
- **Encourage dad to spend on-on-one time with them, making them feel special and building their relationship.**
- **Look after your own stress levels – switch on the answering machine or let the phone ring.**