



ROOM FOR ALL OF US

How do you cope when there's a new arrival in your household?

Welcoming a new baby into your family can be an exciting time, but it can also be fraught with many different emotions. Perhaps your parents have had a late baby just when you thought your family dynamic was complete. Or maybe you're an older sibling in a blended family, with a step-parent, and the new arrival is the first baby they've had together. Being an older sibling is a very special role, but you may also be experiencing conflicted feelings – especially in the beginning. Here's how to cope.

Strong emotions

It's important to understand that a new baby in the household is a big change. Anna Mathur is a psychotherapist and author of parenting books. She explains: 'Change is uncomfortable for humans, but it's also part of life. Familiarity,

stability and predictability can make you feel safe, but with a new baby, suddenly your home sounds different, feels different and even looks different. It can feel like a little storm has arrived.'

It can be hard to know how to feel. On the one hand, you might be grateful that your little brother or sister has arrived safely, and excited to play with them in the future, but on the other hand you might also feel jealous of all the attention they are getting, or resentful of the impact on your life.

Joanne Callan is a wellbeing coach with Relax Kids, and explains that it's normal to feel several conflicting emotions at the same time. 'You can experience excitement and love alongside anger and jealousy,' she says. 'Feelings are not black and white – they are often varied and multi-coloured.'

Your feelings are okay

Whatever your mix of emotions, it's okay and you don't need to feel guilty for having them. Maybe you're upset because during the pregnancy your parents spent a lot of money on things for the new arrival. Or you might feel overlooked when friends and relatives come to meet the new baby and are so focused on cuddles that they don't seem interested in you. You might even feel embarrassed at this clear evidence of your parents being intimate with each other to make a baby.

'Just because you're feeling sad, it doesn't mean you don't love your new sibling,' says Joanne. 'Your world has changed and our brains don't like change.'

Anna suggests thinking about and naming your emotions, to better understand them. Try saying to yourself 'I am angry and that's okay', or 'I feel resentful and that's alright'. Think about where those feelings are coming from and why. Then you can ask yourself what you need to say or do to move forward.

Talk to your parents

When a newborn arrives, the adults in the household need to spend a lot of time feeding and caring for him or her. Anna says: 'Babies take a lot of work, so remind yourself this isn't forever – it's just for now.' Try empathising with your parents. Think about how you feel when you're tired or stressed. 'If your mum is grumpy, snappy or forgetful, remember that you can feel like that when you're tired too,' advises Anna. 'It's not your fault and it's not about you.'

Rather than feeling sidelined, you could offer to help with things like bath time and nappy changes to connect with your parents and feel part of the experience.

Anna also suggests talking to your parents and explaining how you feel, but being realistic in your expectations. You might miss your Saturday afternoon shopping trips with your mum, but it's unlikely she can join you in doing them right now. Instead, you could just simply explain that you

miss her and would love to spend a little time watching a show or hanging out together.

If you are part of a blended family, you might have some more deep-rooted fears. Joanne says: 'One of the big worries is whether your parents or step-parents are going to love a new baby more than you.' Don't bottle these feelings up. If you can't articulate them to your parents, try speaking to another trusted adult like a grandparent or aunt. And remind yourself that a new baby often means more love in the household – not less. 'Remember that you are the one who taught your parents how to be parents, which is really important,' adds Joanne.

Embrace being an older sibling

Being a big sister or brother can be lots of fun. For a start, your younger sibling will likely look up to you and you can be there for every exciting first – their first smile, first word, first steps and first birthday. One day you can show them how to ride a bike and hold their hand before their first day at school. Having a little brother or sister also gives you the opportunity to embrace your silly side, watch childish movies and enjoy the things you feel you should grow out of, but might still secretly enjoy.

Your friendship will be life-long. Siblings can support each other through some of life's toughest moments, and you can begin that relationship right now. Joanne says: 'Look for all the positives in your new role. Having a younger sibling can be a lot of fun, with loads of opportunities for joy and play. When the pressure is on among your peers to act more grown up, you can go home and pull silly faces to make a baby giggle.'

It's okay to keep focusing on your own life, friendships and interests too. With a little understanding and an open mind, you will soon find your new balance.

For information, visit annamathur.com or relaxkids.com



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