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Familias, Pediatras y Adolescentes en la Red. Mejores padres, mejores hijos.

Preventive approach on childish jealousy

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Jealousy is a normal reaction but it **is not the only one** (reaction) which a child experiences when their sibling is born. They also feel happy, surprised, intrigued, they feel they are theirs, they want to hug and touch them, etc.

Adults often give importance to a specific behaviour (jealousy or lack of respect of the rules) and the child ALL is said to be “jealous”, “naughty”, etc. This tendency to generalise is quite frequent but it is not useful.

Regarding childish jealousy, parents often express their worry about the “dethroned” prince’s future reactions because of their new sibling and want to know what to do to ease the adaptation to the new sibling.

Jealousy is a mixture of essential emotions. On the one hand, **love**: the child truly loves (a lot!) their dad, mum and the new sibling but, at the same time, feels **rage** because the new sibling is their mum’s main occupation, they cry and their mum looks worried. Before, everybody paid close attention to them and now it is not the same (lowering up to 50% is a very relevant “discount”). For some children, the fact that their mum stays at hospital because of the birth can make them feel anxious. It might be the first time they are not with their mother, they see her tired and ill-like and, unconsciously, they blame the new baby because their mum does not feel well and ready to play all day.

Moreover, some adults within the family, unconsciously and most of the times not on purpose, make situation worse with unlucky, mysterious or two-way comments ...

“Don’t feel jealous of your sibling!”

“I am going to take your sibling.!”

“You must wait, it is your sibling’s turn....”

“Now, your sibling must stay with mum”

Hence, our proposal is a positive and long term approach.

BEFORE THE BABY IS BORN.

The news is known and shared.

Pregnancy and birth become normal (*“The same than when you were to be born”*)

It is explained beforehand that mummy is going to be two days away from home because the sibling is going to be born at hospital.

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WHEN THE BABY IS BORN

They are allowed to meet their sibling as soon as possible.

They must touch, hug or hold them (Keeping an eye on it, of course)

They can look at them and their parts are pointed. Babies are funny and have surprising gestures...

They can put a finger in the baby's hand. This trigger the reflex of "clipping" and the fist will get closed over that finger. It is a moment to feel happy and say *"Look, he is grasping your hand, he is becoming to know you. He will play with you soon!"*.

Of course, breastfeeding and taking care of the baby take time but that does not mean that the new baby needs complete dedication. Everything that you do with the baby can be done with the elder sibling by your side while you talk to them, tell them anecdotes or show them some skills. The elder sibling is not an obstacle, they learn a lot. Talking to the elder sibling means growing words in the baby's brain. Asking them for favours is useful in order to develop skills. And they must know that you thank them because of their help.

Siblings are frequently compared although it is better to avoid this. Every child is a PERSON. Only situations can be compared: *"When you were a baby, like Juan, you also had a trolley, or we made us photographs, or you were breastfed all the time..."*

Being an "elder" child does not just mean sacrifices (*"you must wait", "you must help..."*). It must also imply some advantages.

You must be generous praising your child: *"I like so much the way you do that. I can notice you have grown, you are becoming a man." "I am very proud of you, you waited until we cleaned Laura even though you were hungry and wanted a snack..."*

You need to look for a moment to pay close attention to them. A while to be alone with one of their parents (*"I love playing with you, going to the park, going to the cinema"*), to read a tale before bedtime (*"I enjoy a lot when we read a tale"*).

WHEN HE FEELS JEALOUS

It is good to "anticipate" the moments when the elder sibling wants to regain their leading role (he usually wants to pee or something else "right" when it is breastfeeding time). Hence, the situation must be thought beforehand. *"Come here, bring that chair and a tale, Irene must eat. You read me a tale or we read together. Or we can read it to the baby ... and so we three have fun together"*.

Of course, you need to set some **limits**:

- You cannot hurt the baby.
- You cannot take the baby alone.

Last, let's remember that it is Essentials to ACCEPT basic emotions, even jealousy and rage. For the sibling, it is complicated to deal with opposed feelings. But that can happen to adults every day.

What if the elder sibling says "I don't love my sibling", "You ugly", "Send him back to hospital", "Get someone to take him?"

- It is useless and it will not help at all to tell them not to say that again. They feel that way. That is their feeling no matter what you say.

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- You must explain them that it is normal to love them sometimes and to feel rage in other moments in which the baby changes their habits.
- You must help them understand and discover that there is a feeling of love to be discovered and enjoyed.

For that reason:

- You must give them more love back.
- You must tell them many times that we still love them...

In this situation, children are more vulnerable when you criticize them and we must point out that a wrong behaviour must be corrected but respecting the person. This means that we should not say *“You are clumsy, you spilled the water”* but *“The water has dropped, come on, I will show you how to collect it”*.

Or: *“You are naughty. You threw the car to the baby’s crib, you can hurt him/her”*

Facts to remember:

- Jealousy is a normal reaction that can be sometimes observed but it will be unnoticed most of the times.
- It is a mixture of love and rage, difficult for children to process.
- It is good that the child knows that it is normal to feel contrasting sensations and name them.
- You must pay attention to the elder sibling, they must enjoy their new status, they must feel important.
- Children behave better when they are given unconditional love and approval.
- It is much more frequent to observe love reactions, such as taking care of, soothing and lulling the child in the elder sibling. They will enjoy together very soon!