



International Childbirth Education Association

Teaching Sibling Classes—ICEA Teaching Idea Sheet #11

Parents need to know that a Sibling Class will not change how the child has been living for eight months. Sibling preparation is a long term parental responsibility. The child comes to a Sibling Class with prior learning from the family, media, peers and school. A Sibling Class can: confirm accurate information; correct misconceptions; provide information and experiences not readily available elsewhere; and stimulate questions and subsequent at-home learning.

Suggest that before the class the sibling:

1. Attend a prenatal exam with mom
2. Visit and/or help babysit for a newborn
3. Observe breastfeeding (if the mother plans to breastfeed) at La Leche meetings or elsewhere
4. Look at own baby pictures
5. Collect baby pictures from catalogs or magazines to make a scrapbook
6. Help prepare the baby's clothing and room

7. Look at children's books about having a new baby in the family.

Logistics - Schedule classes when there are few conflicts with children's naps and activities—Saturday morning? Sunday afternoon?

Ages – Children younger than 3 have trouble sitting still and focusing on lecture and activities in class. You might want to divide classes among younger (3-6 years) and older (6 and older) siblings. However, limiting attendance on age alone is not always appropriate. Maturity levels differ drastically and children process what is appropriate for their level. Parents should come with their children to the class so they can participate in the learning and remove bored or disruptive children, if necessary.

Invitations—Prepare simple invitations enhanced with stickers or cartoons for the siblings. In the invitation ask each child to bring:

- A Picture of themselves to make a “birth day” card for the baby

- A doll or stuffed animal to practice diapering and holding, unless you have a collection of dolls for this purpose.

Name tags for each child and adult—Print children's names and ages on their name tag. The ages will help gauge more accurately what might be expected from each child. Adding bright stickers to the name tags make them appealing and fun to the children.

Learning Activities

1. Give each child a paper newborn foot and hand print; ask the siblings to outline their own hands and feet on the same page and make comparisons with the newborn prints.
2. Have a variety of bright stickers, crayons, scissors, glue sticks, and large blank index cards or poster boards for backing available. The siblings can cut out their photos and arrange stickers around them to make “birth day” cards; precut laminating material to make the



- cards more durable is also a good thing to have available. The completed cards can be placed near the new baby's bed or on a string hanging over it.
3. Show Injoy Videos films for sibling preparation.
 4. Place fetal development charts around the room so the children can look at them; put on the ICEA fetal model t-shirt and talk about the uterus, placenta, and cord.
 5. Lead a role play of being a baby in utero; gather the children in a circle, have them cross their legs, close their eyes, and listen as you play placental sounds and a mother's heart beat.
 6. Use a large mother doll with an open-bottomed pouch sewn on to demonstrate labor and birth; help the doll have at least fifteen minutes of labor contractions, breathing techniques, grunting, and pushing. Between the contractions, talk about the length of labor and where it will take place.
 7. Talk about the hard work of labor, the pain the mother will experience, and the blood.
 8. Give children disposable doctors' hats, masks, and booties to show how the doctors, nurses, and midwives dress for birth.

9. Talk about the work of pushing a baby out; have children push a heavy object to show how hard it can be.
10. Use a life-size newborn baby doll to show what babies look like.
11. Have children practice diapering and holding their dolls/stuffed animals.
12. Place the children's diapered dolls/animals one at a time in a borrowed hospital bassinet; talk about where babies who stay overnight in the hospital might sleep.
13. Have parents provide refreshments for a mid-class break
14. Show a video of labor and birth
15. Encourage children to vocalize responses to: "Let me hear how babies tell you they are hungry? Lonely? Sad? Wet? Hot? Cold?" Play a recording of a baby crying as a clue to the children.
16. If possible, take a quick tour of the labor and delivery and postpartum area; show the electric beds and medical equipment
17. Ceremoniously call each child up to receive a Big Brother/Sister tee shirt or diploma at the end of the session.

Questions to ask and/or clarify the answers to at various times during the class:

- How many of you are expecting new babies in your families?
- How do you feel about having a new baby in your family?
- Where is the baby now? (Solicit answers from the younger children first)
- How long will labor take?
- Where will you go when your mom goes to the hospital to have the baby?
- Has the baby grown bigger inside your mom?
- How does the baby get food in there?
- How will the baby get out?
- What is a newborn baby like?
- What do babies wear when they are born?
- Do new babies have teeth? Hair?
- What can babies eat?
- Can new babies see? Can they hear?
- What can newborn babies do?
- What songs can you sing to a newborn baby?

Sibling Classes can provide a challenge to experiment with a variety of teaching methods. Working with children in this way can also be an antidote to educator burnout. Though

sibling classes require a great deal of meticulous preparation, they are never dull and most often are fun and energizing.