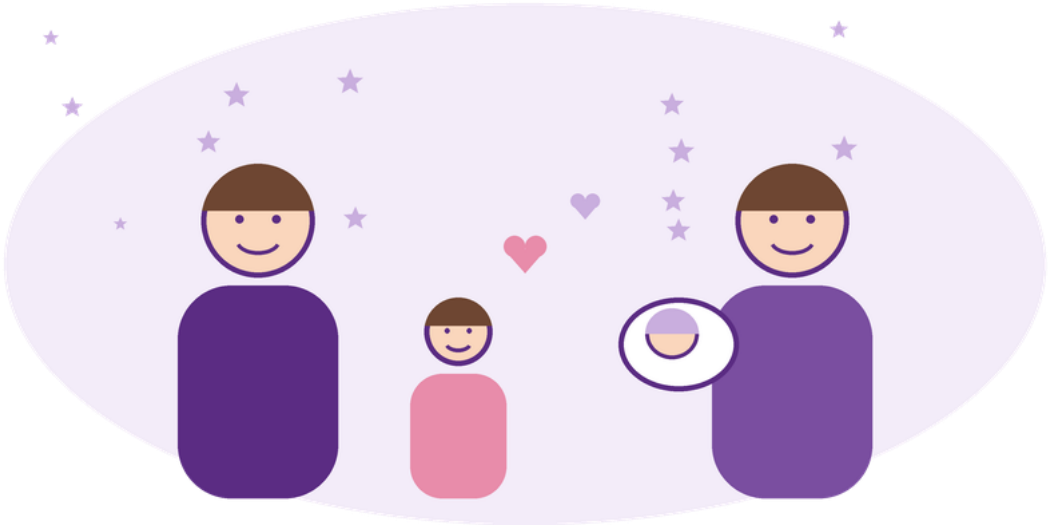
New Baby, Big Changes

Helping your autistic child get ready for a new brother or sister



A new baby brings a lot of change: new sounds, new routines and new people visiting. For many autistic children, change and uncertainty can feel overwhelming.

This guide shares practical, gentle ideas to help your child understand what is happening, feel safe, and find their place as a big brother or sister.

Why a new baby can feel so big

Understanding what your child may be experiencing

Every child reacts differently. Some are excited, some seem not to notice, and some find the changes very hard. For autistic children, a new sibling can bring several challenges at once:

Changes to routine

Parents may be tired, appointments increase, and familiar routines can shift or disappear for a while. Predictability helps many autistic children feel safe.

New sensory experiences

Crying, new smells (nappies, baby lotion, milk), extra visitors and a busier home can all add sensory load.

Something hard to picture

"A baby is coming" is abstract and far away. It can be difficult to imagine what that will actually mean day to day.

Big feelings

Your child may feel worried, jealous, confused or left out, and may not have the words to tell you. Feelings often show through behaviour instead.

Changes in behaviour are a form of communication, not "naughtiness".

Getting ready: a gentle timeline

Adapt the timing to suit your child — some do better with less notice

Early on	• Think about when to tell your child. Some children cope better with a shorter wait — a "baby coming soon" message closer to the time. • Use **clear, concrete language**: "Mummy has a baby growing in her tummy. The baby will come out when it is cold, after Christmas." • Read picture books about new babies together.
Middle months	• **Make any changes now** — moving bedrooms, a new bed or a new car seat — so they are settled before baby arrives. • Visit friends with babies, or watch short videos of babies feeding, sleeping and crying. • Practise with a doll: nappy changes, gentle touch, quiet voices. • Start a personalised social story (see page 7).
Final weeks	• **Use a visual countdown** calendar so your child can see the time passing. • Make a clear plan for who will look after your child during the birth — and practise it. • Play recordings of baby cries at low volume and try ear defenders or headphones. • Set up the cot and baby items so they become part of the "normal" home.
Baby is here	• Keep your child's routines as consistent as you can. • Plan the first meeting so it is calm, short and predictable. • Protect special one-to-one time each day, even 10 minutes.

Practical ideas that help

Pick the ones that suit your child

Social stories

A short, personalised story with photos of your family can explain what will happen, step by step: who will look after them, what the baby will do and what will stay the same.

Visual supports

- A countdown calendar to the due date.
- A visual timetable showing the day, including when baby feeds and when it is "my time".
- "First… then…" boards for waiting, e.g. "First baby's feed, then Lego with Dad."

Sensory preparation

- Introduce baby smells (lotion, washing powder) gradually before the birth.
- Keep ear defenders, headphones or a favourite sensory item easy to reach.
- Create a quiet calm corner your child can go to when the house feels too busy.

A special role

- Offer simple, optional jobs: choosing a sleepsuit, fetching a nappy, singing a song.
- A small "from the baby" gift can help the first meeting feel positive.
- Praise specific moments: "You were so gentle stroking her foot."

The birth and the first meeting

Planning reduces uncertainty for everyone

A plan for while you are away

- **Who** will care for your child? Ideally someone familiar, with a back-up person.
- **Where** will they be? Staying at home keeps routines most familiar.
- **What** does the carer need? Write down routines, foods, calming strategies and comfort items.
- Show your child the plan in pictures and practise it if you can.

Meeting the baby

- Choose a calm time, with as few other visitors as possible.
- Have baby in the cot or with someone else, so your arms are free for a hug first.
- Keep it short and let your child lead — looking from a distance is fine.
- Tell them exactly what is happening: "This is Ava. She is sleeping. You can touch her foot gently."

Visitors

Lots of people coming to the house can be very hard. It is OK to limit visitors, set short visiting times, or ask guests to say hello to your older child first.

Life with a new baby

Settling into the "new normal"

Keep routines steady

Mealtimes, bedtime, school runs and favourite activities are anchors. If something must change, prepare your child with pictures and warnings.

Protect one-to-one time

Short, regular, predictable time together — shown on the visual timetable — reassures your child that they still matter.

A safe space for everyone

Make sure your child has a space that is just theirs, and that baby's things are kept safely out of reach. Supervise all time together, especially in the early weeks.

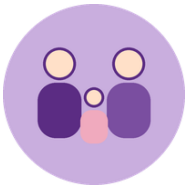
Expect ups and downs

It is very common for children to go backwards for a while — toileting, sleep, eating or more meltdowns and shutdowns. This usually settles with time, patience and routine.

If you are worried about your child's safety around the baby, or behaviour is not settling, **please ask for help early.**

My Big Brother / Big Sister Story

Fill this in together and add photos or drawings



My name is

I live with

A new baby is coming to live with us. The baby will arrive in

When Mummy goes to have the baby, I will stay with

Babies cry, sleep and drink milk a lot. When the baby cries I can

Some things will stay the same. I will still

If I feel worried or cross I can

I can help by

I am a big brother / big sister and my family loves me.

Looking after you, too

Support for parents and carers

Preparing for a new baby while supporting an autistic child is a lot. Rest when you can, accept practical help, and remember that "good enough" really is good enough.

Where to get help

- **Your midwife and health visitor** — tell them about your child's needs early so they can help you plan.
- **Your GP** — for your own wellbeing, including low mood or anxiety during or after pregnancy.
- **Your child's school or nursery** — let them know about the new baby so they can offer extra support and spot changes.
- **Sycamore Trust UK Family Services** — workshops, family support and advice for autistic children and their families in Barking and Dagenham, Havering and Redbridge.
- **National Autistic Society** — information and advice for families: autism.org.uk
- **Family Hubs and Children's Centres** — local groups, parenting support and baby services in your borough.

Disclaimer

This guide is for general information only and does not replace individual advice from a health or education professional. Every child is different; please use the ideas that suit your family. If you have concerns about your child's wellbeing or safety, contact your GP, health visitor or Sycamore Trust UK Family Services.