Adjusting to a new sibling

Preparing to welcome a new baby into your home is an exciting time, however it may also be a difficult time of adjustment for siblings. Many siblings struggle with anxiety and fear during this time; this may be due to thoughts of being left out, worries about not having their parents' undivided attention and worries about sharing their space and toys with someone else. Autistic siblings can especially find this period of adjustment difficult.

What follows are some ideas for you to consider:

- Prepare the person: You may need to start preparation far in advance or it could be they cope better being told just before the new arrival, so they don't have too long to overthink it. Only you will know which option is best. To prepare you could:

1. Use a visual countdown towards the due date (with some flexibility).
2. Write checklists of things that will change.
3. Write specific stories about specific situations e.g., baby crying, baby changing.
4. Go to the scan together.

- Body changes may cause confusion or distress so you may need to prepare for this change in advance too. Perhaps showing photographs or pictures could highlight the changes in the body.
- Avoid assumptions around feelings: Don't assume that just because someone uses verbal language, they are able to communicate their feelings effectively. Some autistic people have alexithymia, meaning it can be difficult to identify and describe emotions. This could mean that when you ask the person how they feel they genuinely won't know.
- Provide ways for feelings to be communicated: This may be through a variety of methods including signing, drawings, written word. Explore more creative means to communicate such as dance, drama, or music.
- Talk proactively about the baby: If you have decided on a name use this in conversation when discussing the new baby. This can help put the baby into context and will help the person understand that the baby is actually a person.

- Books and videos about new babies coming into the family could be viewed and read together.
- Show the person old photographs of them as a baby: You could extend this activity by sorting out photos in a sequence of age.
- Reinforce the concept of 'baby' in natural settings: This may be when you are out shopping or visiting a friend's house. This helps solidify that babies are a part of everyday life.
- Role play: You could buy some dolls and role play the act of caring for a baby. You could go about your daily jobs with the doll in your arms or pretending to feed the doll, so the person gets used to you carrying a baby and sharing your attention. If using a doll be careful that you adequately teach that the doll is pretend.
- Depending on the changes that will occur when the baby comes along you may need to introduce an alternative care giver: If this is the case arrange visits and days out with this new person.
- Make time: If possible, provide one-to-one time with yourself, away from the new baby. This doesn't always have to be trips out, something as little as 10 minutes alone time, at bedtime reading a story together can be just as valuable.
- Make any big changes ahead of the new baby's arrival: This limits the amount of disturbance to routine and limits the number of changes.
- Involve them in the preparations for the new baby: They may enjoy being given responsibilities such as decorating the room or shopping for the new baby. You could support them to choose things for the new baby.
- Arrange opportunities for the person to have time away from the new baby: This may look like time away with friends or you could create a quiet space in your house to be used when needed.