

# And baby makes four

• DR. BATYA L. LUDMAN

**'H**mm - the WhatsApp I sent was read days ago, and finally one of its four questions has been answered. I am guessing that means they're okay but feeling very overwhelmed and exhausted," I said to my husband, with reference to our children who just had their second child 17 days before. We'd heard that the newborn wakes his older sister and as a result both parents and both children are up "all" night.

Our first child woke up so many times a night, until he was 14 months old, that I think we were too tired to realize how tired we were.

Two kids - in many ways that seemed easier, as almost nothing was new anymore. Our second child came, and having slowly and painfully figured things out with the first child, No. 2 seemed like a breeze. Except, of course, when I invited the neonatologist to please check out our irritable baby on day two; and, of course, six weeks later, when we ventured out for our first two-hour date alone, only to be promptly summoned home. Oh, and I felt like I was No. 2's personal dairy, though I quickly mastered doing several things simultaneously, such as nursing and stirring a pot while answering questions.

It almost worked until his very verbal three-year-old brother would say, "Mom, what did I just say?" Often, though I could repeat back perfectly the last sentence he had uttered, I didn't have a clue what he told me, as I was quite possibly sleeping while standing up.

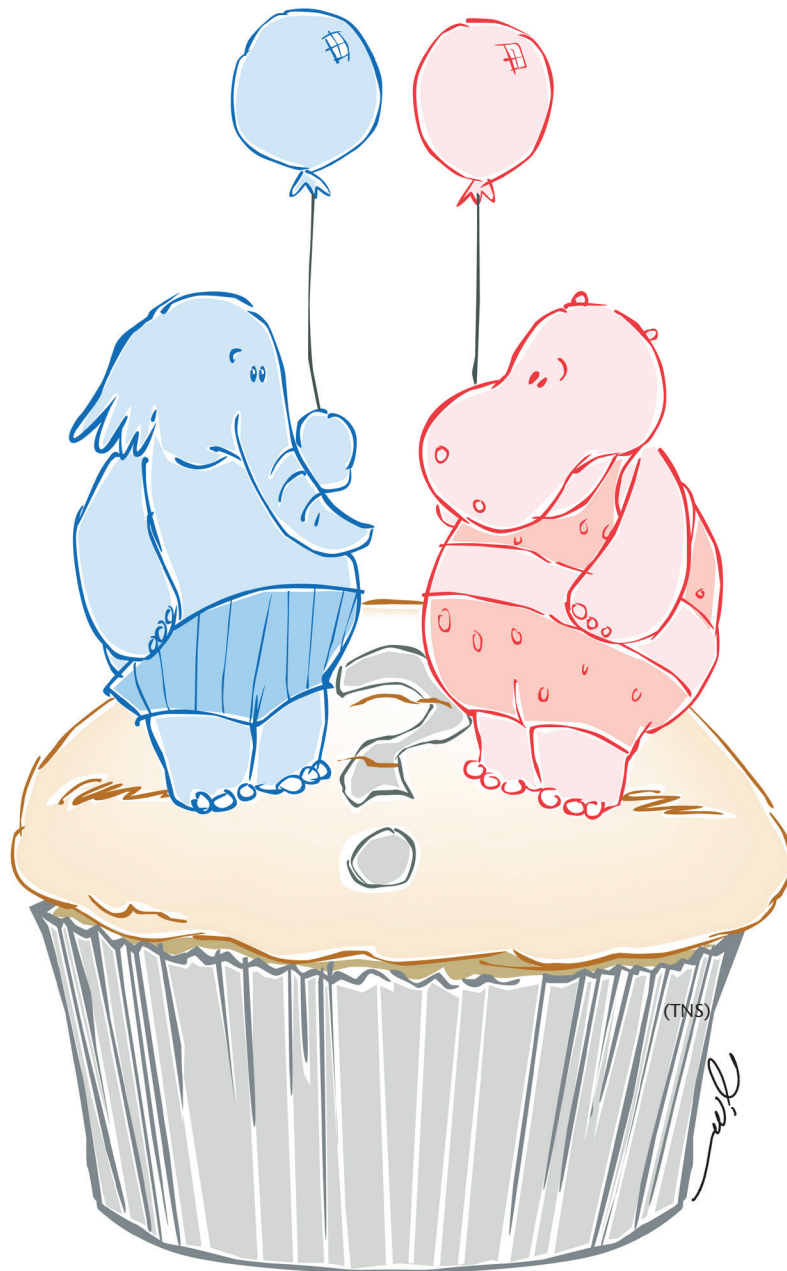
I do remember the trip home from the hospital with child No. 2 because I insisted on driving. After having been called "deary" one too many times, I cut my hospital bracelet off, to my husband's chagrin, and, as we left the hospital, reminded him that I knew my name and that he should humor me as I attempted to get just a little control back over my life.

Fast-forward, because during the first month, aside from reading nonstop to our first child while our second nursed every possible moment and more, I guess life really was a blur. One day I remember asking child No. 1 if he'd please get me a diaper. The minute the words were out, I knew I blew it, and he confirmed that I should never have framed it as a question. Looking me squarely in the eye, he actually had the chutzpah to say "No!" and walked away, leaving me with child No. 2 high and not dry, testing every ounce of patience I had.

Some 30 years later, as I watch my gorgeous perfect granddaughter being in love with her new, real live, doll-sized brother, she's giving her parents a run for their money, as she lets her needs be known.

I HAD the following words of advice for them, but I think our kids are definitely too tired to read anything; and, seriously, why would they listen to their pediatric psychologist and pediatrician parents whose knowledge is so old-fashioned? Here are some thoughts:

1. Always think safety. Never leave your baby with his older sibling for even a minute, unless you're absolutely certain that they're both mature enough and you really can trust them. Anything less than eight years spacing may not be quite good enough ☹. Never leave them unattended together. If you must go to the bathroom, put the baby in a safe place or bring him along.
2. Your older child may look like he loves that precious new baby to bits, but that may mean he wants to feed the little one little bits, such as raisins, beads and other tiny



things. He may also want to give a loving hug that may be just a little too vigorous.

3. Recognize that you're exhausted. In addition to hormones running wild, you'll be short on energy, patience, insight, ideas and humor - all of which are crucial at this point. You'll need to dig deep within yourself for strength.

4. Call in resources - grandparents, siblings or friends. Bring in meals and send out laundry, if there are not enough hands. Your goal is survival - to eat, sleep, and parent your kids with love and consistency. The rest will happen, I promise. It takes time.

## You really can love more than one child

5. Remind yourself how you'd feel, if your partner were to suddenly show up with another woman/man on his arm, cooing cutesy baby talk and adorations of love; if your partner were to give you a strong directive to also love this person, share your room, books, clothes, possessions and everything else, and do it without any resentment or jealousy, only graciously and with a smile. Would you be very happy, if your position in the family were usurped?

Now imagine how your older child may feel. He may be very jealous and resent you and the baby, but not have the words to tell you; or if he does verbalize his feelings, it may be to ask you to please send the baby away - now.

6. If you're fortunate to be reading this before your second child is born, remember, the best defense is to be proactive. Prepare in advance. Be as organized as possible and anticipate some of the difficulties, not the least of which is that you may be separated from your first child for the first time when you are in the hospital, and upon your

return, he'll look very grown up compared to that little baby in your arms. You'll need to refine your expectations. Some regression is perfectly normal.

7. I made a "special big sibling" book for my older children left at home for when I went off to the hospital. This activity book was designed to let them know they were loved and missed, and to help welcome the baby (the one who just eats, sleeps, cries and poops) and have the baby welcome them, sometimes with various messages or gifts! They loved it.
8. Create short dates with your older child. Run errands, buy small treats and give them a choice of venue. This is a time to listen to them. Have them help open some of the baby gifts and put aside some small gifts for them. Let them choose a book you can read to them while feeding child No. 2.
9. You really can love more than one child. Recognize that this is not an easy time; you may feel overwhelmed, and you'll have little "me" time. If you feel you are having difficulty coping - even if it feels normal, talk to someone. A friend, a parent or a professional can all be of great help. Sometime soon, you'll smile hearing the squeals of delight from your baby as he is lovingly entertained by his older sibling. ■

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