

TODDLER REGRESSION & JEALOUSY

Survival Guide

Why it happens, what to do, and what to say

Part of the 2 Under 2 Survival Bundle



What's inside

- **Daily Rhythm Template**
Morning, afternoon & evening blocks for baby + toddler
- **Overlap Finder**
Spot your double-nap window and protect it fiercely
- **Weekly Rhythm Overview**
See the whole week — and track what shifted
- **Survival Mode Guide**
What to do when the rhythm falls apart completely

■ A note from one mom to another

When my second baby arrived, my toddler changed overnight. Tantrums came back. Potty training reversed. She stopped sleeping. I thought I had broken her. I hadn't. She was grieving. This guide is everything I wish I'd known.

✓ **Research-backed** · **Written by a mom of 2 under 2** · **Nurse reviewed** · **No fluff**

What Regression Actually Is

Understanding what's happening in your toddler's brain makes it easier to respond.

■ Regression is a stress response, not bad behaviour

When a toddler experiences a major change — like a new sibling — their nervous system goes into overload. Skills they've mastered (sleeping alone, using the potty, eating well) require cognitive energy. Under stress, that energy is redirected to survival. They don't "unlearn" things. They temporarily can't access them. This is biology, not defiance.

Why a new sibling triggers regression

- Their whole world has changed overnight — routine, attention, their place in the family.
- They've lost exclusive access to you. That's a profound loss, even if they can't name it.
- They can see you're stressed. Toddlers co-regulate — if you're overwhelmed, they feel it.
- They don't have the language to say "I'm scared this baby replaced me." So they show it.

■ The 3 things to hold onto

1. It is temporary.

Most regression resolves within 4–8 weeks with consistent support.

2. It is not your fault.

You didn't cause this by having a second child.

✓ What regression is NOT

- It is NOT your toddler being manipulative or attention-seeking.
- It is NOT a sign you've failed as a parent.
- It is NOT permanent — even when it feels like it will never end.
- It is NOT something you can punish away. Punishment makes it worse.

Types of Regression

What it looks like and what actually helps for each type.

■ Sleep Regression

SIGNS

- Refusing to go to bed alone after months of sleeping independently.
- Waking in the night and needing you like a newborn.
- Early morning waking — 5am starts that weren't happening before.
- Nightmares or night terrors more frequently.

WHAT HELPS

- Don't fight it — temporarily increase bedtime support. Sit in the room.
- Extra one-on-one time during the day reduces night need.
- Keep the routine consistent even when it's hard.
- Avoid sleep training during this window — it will backfire.

■ Eating Regression

SIGNS

- Refusing foods they previously ate without issue.
- Wanting to be fed like a baby.
- Decreased appetite or increased snacking.

WHAT HELPS

- Offer familiarity — go back to favourites they've always liked.
- Let them be fed sometimes. It's connection, not regression.
- Avoid pressure. You offer, they choose.

■ Potty Regression

SIGNS

- Accidents after months of being reliably trained.
- Refusing to use the potty or asking for nappies back.
- Hiding to poo, or seeming to "forget" the toilet exists.

WHAT HELPS

- Put the pull-ups back if needed. There is no shame in this.
- Do not express disappointment — it adds shame and slows recovery.
- Keep offering the potty calmly. When she's ready, it comes back fast.

■ Behaviour Regression

SIGNS

- More tantrums, bigger meltdowns, less ability to regulate.
- Clingy, whiny, needing to be held more than usual.
- Lashing out — at you, at the baby, at peers.
- Baby talk, thumb-sucking, other babyish behaviours.

WHAT HELPS

- More physical connection — cuddles, lap time, skin contact.
- Lower stimulation — fewer activities, more quiet home time.
- Name emotions: "You miss having me all to yourself."
- If they hit the baby: supervise closely, never shame, redirect firmly.

Toddler Jealousy

The most emotionally complex part of bringing home a sibling.

■ Why jealousy happens

Toddlers are egocentric by development — not by selfishness. Before the baby, they were the centre of your world. That's not a problem. That's exactly how it should be. When the baby arrives, they experience a profound displacement. They can't understand "you have enough love for both." They only know: something changed. Something was lost.

■ What jealousy looks like

- Aggression toward the baby (hitting, poking, grabbing)
- Telling you to "put the baby back"
- Acting out when you feed or hold the baby
- Wanting everything the baby gets — held, rocked, sung to
- Ignoring the baby entirely — refusing to acknowledge them
- Being overly "helpful" in a controlling way
- Meltdowns that feel bigger than the trigger
- Testing limits constantly to see if they still have you

What makes jealousy WORSE vs BETTER

x WORSE

- Forcing them to share you — "baby needs me, wait."
- Defending the baby — "be careful, baby is little."
- Making them perform affection — "give baby a kiss."
- Comparing — "you were never this difficult."

✓ BETTER

- Naming their feelings without fixing them.
- Protecting one-on-one time, however brief.
- Giving them a role — helper, song-singer, blanket-passer.
- Acknowledging the loss: "things changed. That's hard."

■ This is a phase. It passes.

Jealousy typically peaks in the first 2–3 months and begins to ease as the toddler finds their new role in the family. Children who are given language for their feelings, and whose parents stay regulated and connected, move through this faster. You don't have to fix their jealousy. You just have to stay.

Scripts — What to Say

Read these off the page if you need to. Soft voice. Slower than normal.

When they say "put the baby back"

"I know. You miss it being just us. That makes sense."

Don't defend the baby. Just name their feeling.

When they're clingy while you're feeding

"I hear you. I'm feeding baby right now. In 5 minutes I am all yours."

Give a time, then honour it. Predictability is the antidote to jealousy.

When they won't acknowledge the baby

"You don't have to like the baby right now. I love you exactly the same."

Forcing a relationship backfires. Let it come naturally.

When they ask if you love the baby more

"I love you both completely. My love didn't split — it grew."

Avoid "equally" — they'll test it. "Completely" leaves no gaps.

When they hit the baby

"I'm not going to let you hurt the baby. I'll help you find another way to show me you're upset."

Firm but calm. Move them away — not with shame but with clear safety.

When they want to be held like the baby

"You want to be held like the baby. Come here. Of course I can hold you."

Let them. It's a request for closeness. Meeting it doesn't reinforce it.

When things are calm — proactive

"You were my first love. Nothing will ever change that. Not ever."

Say this at a quiet moment, not during a crisis. It lands deeper.

After you've snapped

"I got angry. That wasn't about you. I'm sorry. You didn't do anything wrong."

Repair matters more than perfection. Do it every time.

Day-by-Day Strategies

Practical things to do every day that genuinely move things forward.

Week 1–2 — Survival focus

- Accept that things will be harder. Reduce expectations to zero.
- Don't try to fix jealousy this week. Just stay close.
- One-on-one time doesn't need to be long — 10 focused minutes counts.
- Let toddler help with baby tasks: passing a nappy, choosing a song.
- Narrate the baby's needs out loud: "Baby is crying because she's hungry — just like you used to."

Week 3–4 — Building connection

- Create a "toddler first" moment each morning before the baby needs anything.
- Use baby's nap for uninterrupted toddler time — no phone, no tasks.
- Find one positive role for toddler with baby. Name it daily.
- Acknowledge hard moments without trying to fix them.
- If regression continues: name it. "Your body is finding things hard right now. That's okay."

Month 2–3 — Normalising

- Start to gently hold more limits — you can respond with warmth AND expectations.
- Help them build a relationship with baby on their terms: "baby smiled at you!"
- Watch for improvement windows — they're evidence it's working.
- Keep the one-on-one ritual going, even if shorter.
- If hitting continues: add supervision structure, stay calm, redirect every time.

■ The one daily habit that helps most

5 minutes of undivided attention — no phone, no baby, just them. Every single day. It doesn't matter what you do: read a book,

When It Gets Better

A realistic timeline — and what to watch for.

2–4 weeks

First signs of acceptance

You may notice small moments of curiosity about the baby. Toddler watches them, asks questions. The intensity of meltdowns might slightly reduce.

4–8 weeks

Regression begins to lift

Sleep and potty regressions often start to ease. Behaviour may still be unpredictable but you'll see more windows of the "old" toddler returning.

2–3 months

New normal forms

Toddler starts to find their identity as a sibling. May show genuine affection toward baby. Jealousy doesn't disappear but becomes less overwhelming.

3–6 months

Relationship building

Most regression has resolved. Toddler and baby begin to have their own dynamic. You'll have hard days but the trajectory is unmistakably upward.

■ When to seek additional support

Most regression resolves without professional help. Consider reaching out to your GP, health visitor or a family therapist if: regression is severe and worsening after 3 months, the toddler is hurting the baby repeatedly despite intervention, you are struggling to stay regulated yourself, or you feel chronically overwhelmed. Asking for help is not failure. It is the most practical thing you can do.

My Notes & Observations

Track what you're noticing. Patterns are easier to see when you write them down.

Regression signs I'm seeing

What has helped so far

Scripts I want to try

Things I'm worried about

"They're not giving you a hard time. They're having a hard time."

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