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Introducing the Family Dog to the New Baby



Image: Getty Images via Daylife

After welcoming a baby in to the world you are probably concerned about how your dog is going to react to him or her.

Many people **surrender their pets to shelters** because of exhibited jealousy from their **dog after a new baby's arrival** and **fear of the infant being harmed** by the animal. Yet many families have been successful in **introducing their dogs to the new baby**.

Introducing your dog to you baby is a process that needs time and the utmost of care to **ensure a happy and safe welcoming** process!

The steps to ensuring your dog acts appropriately around the baby when he or she is finally taken back to your home are twofold usually – **preparing your dog for the infants arrival and introducing your dog to your infant**.

Preparing your dog: **Preparing your dog for the baby's arrival** in advance is one of the best ways to help avoid friction and jealousy between your baby and your dog. Your dog is used to your attention and pampering, **some jealousy will naturally surface when your new baby becomes the center of attention**.

Taking some precautions, a few minutes of quality time and some extra treats can go a long way!

Be sure to:

- **Take your dog to your local Veterinarian for a complete checkup a few months before the baby arrives.**
- **Worms and parasites can be harmful to your baby so be sure to worm your dog before the baby arrives and at the normal intervals to keep on top of this problem. If your dog is not spayed or neutered, this is also the time to get it done.**
- **Encourage friends with infants to visit your home to accustom your pet to babies. Supervise all pet and infant interactions.**
- **Allow your dog to explore the baby's sleeping, diaper changing areas, and related items such as baby powder, lotions, and diapers to become familiar with the new smells and objects.** Apply baby lotion or powder to your hands, for example, and allow your dog to sniff the new smell. Dogs rely on their sense of smell, so familiarity with the new baby smells will help him or her recognize the baby as a part of the family. If possible, allow your dog to smell clothing that your baby has used before you bring the baby home.
- **Accustom your pet to baby-related noises months before the baby is expected.**

For example, **play recordings of a baby crying** (there are CDs out now for this exact training purpose – (see

www.soundtherapy4pets.com/ for CDs with baby noises), turn on the mechanical infant swing, and use the rocking chair. Make these positive experiences for your pet by offering a treat or playtime.

- **Do not allow your dog to sleep on the baby's furniture or play with the baby's toys.** Your dog should know that the furniture is not for him or her and should treat it as such. Provide toys for the dog that do not resemble baby toys. A dog may take the toy from the baby's hand and unintentionally injure the infant.
- **If the baby's room will be off-limits to your pet, install a sturdy barrier such as a removable gate (available at pet or baby supply stores) or, for jumpers, even a screen door.** Because these barriers still allow your dog to see and hear what's happening in the room, your dog will feel less isolated from the family and more comfortable with the new baby noises.
- **Use a baby doll to help your pet get used to the real thing. Carry around a swaddled baby doll, take the doll in the stroller when you walk your dog, and use the doll to get your pet used to routine baby activities, such as bathing and diaper changing.**
- **Finally and very importantly, be sure that your dog knows that you and your family are alpha over him or her** – this is crucial to ensure you can reprimand your dog should any jealous signs show when the baby is brought home.

Introducing your dog to your infant

The actual introduction of your dog to your newborn baby is of utmost importance and the first few meetings can often dictate how your dog responds to your baby in an ongoing basis. For this reason, it is crucial to undertake the introduction process slowly and properly.

Tips for the first meeting include

- **When the baby comes home, another person should hold the baby while you greet your dog.** Your dog has missed you and it is important to pay attention to him or her when you first get home.
- **Greet your dog happily and bring him or her a new toy as a gift to associate the baby with something positive.** After your dog's excitement about your homecoming has dissipated you should start introducing your baby to the dog.
- **If you are unsure of your dog's behavior, leash or restrain him or her during the introduction.** Talk to your dog, pet and encourage him or her to get a good look and sniff the baby's hands and feet. **Do not force a reluctant dog by pushing the infant in front of the pet.** Allow the pet to explore the new smells at their own pace. Never leave your baby unsupervised with your pet. **An infant is incapable of pushing the animal away and your dog may inadvertently smother the child.** The actions of a baby may scare your dog and cause it to bite in self-defense. **If your dog reacts aggressively,** put him or her in another room until it is calm and try the introduction again.
- **After the initial greeting, you can bring your pet with you to sit next to the baby; reward your pet with treats for appropriate behavior.** Remember, you want your pet to view associating with the baby as a positive experience. Again, to prevent anxiety or injury, never force your pet to get near the baby, and always supervise any interaction.
- **Life will no doubt be hectic caring for your new baby, but try to maintain regular routines as much as possible to help your pet adjust.** And be sure to spend one-on-one quality time with your pet each day—it may help relax you, too. With proper training, supervision, and adjustments, you, your new baby, and your pet should be able to live together safely and happily as one (now larger) family.

For more information on **dog training techniques** and **how to deal with problem dog behavior** (like accustoming your dog to children), check out *Secrets to Dog Training*.

It's the complete manual for dog ownership and is designed to fast-track your dog's learning.

You can visit the Secrets to Dog Training site by clicking on the link below:

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