

Dogs and Kids, Preparing Your Pet for a New Baby

Welcoming a new baby into the family is a very exciting time, and it is important for parents to make sure that their canine companion(s) are ready for the changes that are about to take place. Instead of waiting a week before your arrival home from the hospital with your new human to start instituting harsh changes and new rules, it is important to start making gradual changes in your dog's routine to get them adjusted to the idea that soon they will be sharing the house with another person. The sooner you start, the easier the transition will be, and less unsure you will be about your new family dynamic.

Canine Refresher Course

Right after you receive the good news is an excellent time to start doing some daily training with your dog to remind him/her of their manners. A properly socialized and trained dog is a must when forming a new canine-human bond.



Be sure to go over all of the basic commands and really try to enforce the household rules, i.e. if you do not want your dog climbing up onto the furniture uninvited than he should be reprimanded each and every time the unwanted behavior is displayed. This is also a good time to get your dog into some new habits such as climbing the stairs before you - no one wants to be tripped up by a wayward dog when they are 9 months pregnant! Be sure to incorporate walks into your routine as this is one of the highest forms of bonding between a dog and their owner. I know this all may seem time consuming, but it will be worth it in the end; if you do not think you will have the amount of time necessary to devote to proper training you may want to consider sending your pet to a doggy daycare that does reinforcement exercises or hiring a dog trainer to spend some time with your dog each week. Pack dominance is key, make sure your dog knows who is the leader of the home.

Socialize

Been awhile since you took your dog to a family event or out for an afternoon in the park? Get out there and do it! The more your dog becomes used to different types of people, the better he will do overall. Socialization has the most effect and is essential if you have a puppy on your hands - the only way they get to know about their world is to go out and experience it first hand. Be sure to be attentive to your dog in these new social situations and watch for any clues of aggression including excessive shyness, tail between the legs, growling or any other unusual signs exhibited by your pet; never force them into a situation that makes them feel uncomfortable. Have your dog meet and greet as many children as possible during this time so he has a chance to get used to their smaller stature, higher voices, faster motions and their forgetfulness to use soft hands when interacting with pets. Ideally, your dog should already be socialized with children if you are expecting a baby, but it is never too late with a little perseverance, patience and a lot of training.

Carry Around a Doll

Crazy as it may seem, carrying the doll around the house with you while you do chores or relax with a book will start to get your dog used to the idea that they can not have your undivided attention at all points in the day. Talk to the baby, sing to the baby, basically do whatever you think you will be doing with the doll that you will be doing with your own child when he/she arrives. It is also a good idea to have the doll "sleep" in the baby's crib.



Allow your dog to go into the room where your new baby will be sleeping and watch you go through the motions with the doll; this is a good idea even if you do not plan to let your dog ever go into this room - this way your dog will know what you are up to when you are in this area and out of his sight. If you do decide to allow your dog into the nursery, make him lay down and stay in a certain area of the room while you are taking care of the baby. The dog should feel like it is a privilege for them to accompany you into this room.

Get Fido Used to the Baby Smell

Babies smell very different to dogs, and the scent alone can take a bit of getting used to from our canine companions. If at all possible, borrow some used baby clothes from a friend or relative to have in the house for the dogs to sniff. It is an excellent idea to place them on the baby you will be carrying around, and also good to place a garment or two in the area where the dog will be sleeping. Bringing home your baby's receiving blanket from the hospital prior to your arrival home (if at all possible in this day of in-and-out deliveries) is also a great way for your dog to associate the smell of baby with positive things.

Have a Plan for Labor

You do not want to be worried about where your dogs will go or who will take care of them while you are in labor. When you pack your bag for your hospital stay, also pack a bag for your dogs if they will be leaving for a friend's house or to spend some time in a kennel. If the dogs are going to be able to stay at your own home, make sure you have all their food, medications and toys in an easy to find location with some general instructions for the person kind enough to take care of your pets. Do not be freaked out if your dogs start acting strange as you are getting ready to depart for the hospital, a lot of dogs get worried when they see their owner in pain and this can manifest itself in odd behaviors not normally exhibited by your pet. Odds are your dog will be the last thing on your mind at this point in time, but please try to remember him.



The day you arrive home from the hospital your dogs should have already gotten a chance to smell the baby's blanket before you even come through the door. If you have a very excitable dog or one that likes to jump up, it is a good idea to get them tired out prior to your arrival home so they are more calm when the new infant comes through the door. Your dog has probably missed you terribly and will want to say hello, so be sure to acknowledge them when you come into the residence. No need to do the introductions when there is still a lot of excitement going on, wait until your dog is relaxed, and then allow them the chance to come over and greet the new baby.

Most dogs will take to a new baby immediately, seeing them as a new extension to their family, and another person with whom to

have companionship and protect.



Not every dog is Lassie though, and interactions between your dog and children should always be supervised. A dog that is ignored or mistreated when a new baby arrives will act out, so just use your head and be sure you are giving everyone as much attention as they need - maybe this is a good time to take up the neighbor boy on his offer to take Fido out for a walk a couple of times a week. No dog deserves to be sent to the pound just because their owner is expecting a baby, yet many dogs die in shelters every year for this exact reason.

Have any tips you would like to add? Be sure to fill out a comment below:)