

# INTRODUCING A NEW BABY AND A PET



The addition of a new baby to a household can upset the social environment of that household and can upset the pets in the household. Steps can be taken to greatly reduce the probability of this happening by following these instructions below. These instructions are primarily designed for two-parent families. However, it is possible to implement most of the instructions if only one parent is available.

**PLEASE REMEMBER THAT NO ANIMAL SHOULD BE LEFT ALONE UNSUPERVISED WITH AN INFANT FOR ANY REASON**

This is not because most animals are innately aggressive towards infants, but rather because no infant would be capable of pushing an animal away if that animal cuddles up to them either for love or for heat. Until the child is old enough to behave absolutely appropriately with the pet (and that could be as old as 10 years of age), do not let children interact alone with the pets until you know how they will respond in those circumstances. This protects both the child and the pet

## **STEP 1:**

Before the baby comes, get the pet used to a regular schedule that you believe is realistic and that will be kept when the infant is present. Start the feeding and walking schedule that the animal will experience once the infant comes. Include in the schedule a 5-10 minute period daily when you will attend only to the pet's needs. This period will represent its quality time and can occur either in one bout or two. During this time, pet the animal, groom it, scratch it, play with the toys, talk to it, massage it, and so on. Maintain the schedule no matter what, and make it one that can be implemented in the presence of an infant. This may necessitate setting an alarm clock 5 minutes earlier or agreeing that even if a baby cries at some point, you will not interrupt the interaction with the pet during those periods if the baby is not overly distressed and if the pet is not distressed by the child's cries. You might also find that it is a time you can set aside for you to relax: the grooming, massage, and conversation with the pet will help you relax. Be realistic and do not feel guilty. Five or ten minutes of concentrated attention is probably more than you give to the animal as a block now. Although everybody will have to adjust to an infant's schedule, this is one way that you can tell the animal that it is still important to you and it counts. Realize that if you have multiple pets, each will need at least 5 minutes of undivided attention each day. If you have pets that get along particularly well with each other, you can certainly team them up to play with or talk to them, but remember that the more animals you have, the more difficult it will be to give them all of the things that they need.

## **STEP 2: (DOG SPECIFIC)**

Start the dog on a leash walking schedule that you anticipate can be maintained with a baby. Make your schedule realistic and implement it before the arrival of your child. It would be preferable if the schedule changes could be made as early as possible before the arrival of the child. This is a good time to consider changing the mechanism you use to walk your dog. If you are using a choke collar or a regular buckle collar and the dog does not behave properly instantaneously, now it is time to teach the dog to walk in a head halter (either a Halti or, preferably, a Gentle Leader Promise System Canine Head Collar) or to teach it to walk on a no-pull harness (Lupi or Sporn Harness). This is the time to get the pet under control so you are able to take the dog with you everywhere you go with the baby where dogs are welcome, and you want the dog to behave well. In addition, you do not want to struggle with a baby in the backpack or in a stroller with a dog that is pulling. That is a potentially dangerous scenario that is could lead to injuries to all three of you. You may want the protection of a dog, the company of a dog, and the necessary exercise for the dog when you are with the baby. A well-controlled dog will give you this. In addition, if you are unable to take the dog everywhere you take the baby, the dog will learn that a baby has displaced it in that role in the family. Although it is inappropriate to use terms such as jealousy when discussing the manner in which the pet treats the baby, any dog or cat will realize its not getting the same amount of attention. Pets will also realize that the attention has been transferred to another individual. This phenomenon could then promote attention-seeking behaviors that are designed to be competitive with the attention the infant is now getting. The more often you can exercise the dog (or cat, if the cat enjoys exercise) with the child, the better everybody's relationship will be. As soon as you learn that an infant will be arriving, obtain and learn to use a device such as the Gentle Leader Promise System Canine Head Collar, a Halti, or a no-pull harness.



## **STEP 3:**

Again, before the baby arrives, allow the pet to explore the baby's sleeping and diaper changing areas. For the same reasons discussed previously, you do not wish to wholly exclude the dog from every place the baby will be. These areas will provide smells that are interesting to the dog or cat. Let the dog or cat become familiar with them. You will be using baby powder, lotions, diapers, and baby objects before you have the baby. Let the dog or cat become accustomed to these by sniffing and even pawing or nosing at them.

If the dog or cat tries to drag any baby items off, correct it by telling it "No" and asking the animal to relinquish the object. If you are unable to get the animal to relinquish the object, now is the time to start teaching the dog more appropriate manners, such as sit, stay, drop, down and drop it. If your dog cannot do these before the arrival of the baby, you will have serious management problems. Now is the time, when you have some time, to address them. It is insufficient to say that your dog has been to an obedience class if the dog still does not respond to you instantaneously for a vocal command.

Do not let the pet make a habit of sleeping in or any of the baby's furniture. It will only seem like a further correction when you do not allow the pet to do so once the baby arrives. Do let the animal become familiar with the area.

If your pet has had toys that are stuffed animals that may look just like infant or baby toys, expect that the pet will think that it can play with the baby toys. If you are willing to wash these, there is nothing wrong from a health standpoint; however, the big problem is that the dog may round up and take all the infants' toys. As the baby ages, the dog may drag the toys from the baby's hand. This can cause unintentional injury.

As the baby settles in, continue to focus on associating him with good things for your dog. You may be tempted to give her plenty of attention when the baby's asleep and then try to get her to lie down, be quiet and leave you alone while the baby's awake. It's actually much better to do the opposite. Try to give your dog lots of attention when the baby is present. Teach her that when he's around, she gets treats, petting, playing and anything else she likes. When you feed the baby, you can feed your dog, too. When you walk your dog, do your best to take the baby along. (Baby "backpacks" and slings are great for dog parents). This strategy, though it requires some skillful multitasking on your part, teaches your dog a valuable lesson. She'll learn to love it when the baby is awake and active because that's when good things happen for her.

## **STEP 4**

Keep a dog bed or comfy mat in the room where you usually feed the baby. When it's time to nurse or give him a bottle, provide something tasty for your dog, too. You can reward her for doing a nice down-stay on her bed, tossing a piece or two of kibble every few moments. Alternatively, you can give your dog an exciting new chew bone or food puzzle toy to work on while you care for the baby in the same room. As often as possible, reward your dog for behaving politely when she's close to the baby. Encouraging calm, controlled behavior now will pay off in the weeks and months ahead as your baby becomes more and more interesting and exciting to your dog. If someone in your family has time, consider taking your dog to a group obedience class or hiring a private trainer to show you how to teach the basics in your own home. A well-trained dog will make your first few days, weeks, months and even years with your child much easier!

### **STEP 5:**

Baby sounds, especially those that are very loud, may upset and confuse your dog. Most dogs simply learn to ignore them, but some need extra help. If your dog seems distressed when the baby makes noise, associate the sounds with things your dog loves. If the baby squeals or cries, toss a tasty treat to your dog right afterward. After a little repetition, your dog will discover that baby sounds don't signal anything bad. In fact, they predict the delivery of food! Many dogs who haven't spent time around children find toddlers confusing and intimidating. Some find them downright scary! Read on to learn about what you can do to influence the developing relationship between your dog and your growing child. As your child develops, teach him to respect your dog's body, safe zones and belongings. Always supervise interactions so that you can guide your child as he learns to communicate and play with your dog appropriately. Playing an active role in the development of a relationship between your child and your dog will benefit everyone.



### **STEP 6:**

Show your child what gentle, enjoyable petting looks like. Teach him to stroke and scratch your dog in her favorite spots. Explain that hitting, kicking or pinching dogs, as well as riding, teasing and intentionally scaring them are NOT okay. Teach your child to play structured games with your dog, like fetch, tug-of-war and hide-and-seek. Training games, trick training and clicker training are also a lot of fun for both kids and dogs. Enroll your dog in obedience classes with an instructor who welcomes children so that your child can learn to be with his dog in a gentle, effective way. When your child gives your dog cues, be sure to back him up. For instance, if your child says "Sit" and your dog complies, help your child praise her like crazy and hand him a treat to give her! If he says "Sit" and she hesitates, immediately repeat "Sit." If you do this consistently, your dog will learn that every time your child requests a behavior, you will too-so she might as well respond to your child and earn a reward more quickly.

### **STEP 7:**

Your child will eventually want to have friends over to play, so it's important for your dog to become comfortable with unfamiliar children. If you have friends with kids, ask them to visit as often as possible. Make sure your dog has a wonderful time during these visits. If she already likes kids, ask young visitors to toss her favorite toy or tell her to sit or lie down to earn tasty treats. If you don't have friends with children, take your dog on frequent outings in well-populated areas. When you encounter friendly children, who would like to interact with your dog, take advantage of the situation. Coach them carefully to ensure good experiences. Always give them treats to feed or toss your dog. If your dog is great with your own child but nervous, fearful or aggressive around other children, seek assistance from a qualified professional as soon as possible. Don't wait until your child matures and your dog's behavior becomes a problem. Please see our article on Finding Professional Behavior Help to locate a behaviorist in your area now.