



A New Baby in the House

As soon as you know you're expecting a baby, preparations for the changes should begin. Your dog needs to be prepared for the alterations to the home environment and routine. With forward planning you can get your dog used to any changes well in advance, that way they will hardly notice a difference by the time the baby comes. This should begin at least 4 months before the baby arrives, it is also advised to get the whole family involved.

1. Feeding

No dog, no matter how well trained they are should ever be left alone near a baby when they are eating. The baby should ideally be in a separate room when the dog is eating. When toddlers approach the dog's food this is often the time when accidents occur or when the baby/toddler tries to take the dog's chew or bone. It is more important them alone and feed them separately, without them having fear of being disturbed or pestered which is when they can nip/bite or worse to protect their food.

If your dog is known for snatching food from hands then it is a good idea to train them to take food from hands more gently (always under supervision with baby/toddler). You could consider going to dog training classes to help you train them.

Dogs will respond well to praise so using words such as 'good boy/girl' when they take food gently from the hand is a reward. They can also learn how to leave dropped food too by using the words 'leave it' and then praising them if they do this well.

It is highly recommended to ask a dog trainer for help if you are struggling or you can book an appointment with one of the vet nurses for advice.

2. Handling/Sleeping

If your dog is used to sleeping in the bedroom and you don't want him there when the baby arrives, he should be moved to somewhere more suitable early on in your pregnancy. Similarly, if you don't want him on the furniture he must learn to stay on the floor as soon as possible so that this new habit is formed well before the baby arrives. You want your dog to be relaxed and happy about being touched all over their body. It will not be long before the baby starts to crawl and investigate their surroundings and want to touch the dog. If your dog is not very confident or showing signs that they are not comfortable around the baby then provide them with a den or crate so they have somewhere safe to go away from the baby.

The crate door should ideally never be closed behind them as this is designed to be their 'safe place' and they may perceive it as punishment if they are locked in and could become even more anxious and stressed.

3. Games and Exercise

You may not feel like walking miles immediately following the birth so it may be useful to start thinking of other forms of exercise for your dog to prevent boredom. For example;

- Throwing them their favourite toy for them to retrieve whilst you are resting on a bench or chair.
- Encourage them to play with other dogs whilst out on walks.
- Start using interactive feeders at home to provide more mental stimulation.
- Make time to play with your dog.
- Teach them to walk calmly by the side of the pram.
- Get friends/family or dog walkers involved to take them out.
- Avoid giving them more treats if they are getting less exercise and they will start to become overweight.

Bored dogs are not happy dogs and will soon become stressed and destructive!

Pet Care Advice

It is not surprising that some dogs can get confused between what are their toys and what are baby's toys as they can be very similar and make the same sounds! Putting toys away after play can sometimes help and can prevent the baby picking them up by mistake. You can also try to restrict play with their toys to when out on walks or in the garden as this might make them understand that play is associated at this time and in this area. Using the 'leave' command is important as part of this training.

Don't forget dogs will get very excited around squeaky toys, whether they are theirs or the baby's this will be hard to stop so you will need to distract them with another toy whilst your baby is playing.

4. General Control & Other Preparations

Short obedience training sessions every day will help improve the dog's willingness to do as he is told. It will also provide a mental stimulus which can be carried on after the birth at a time when he may not be getting very much physical exercise. Ensuring that your dog responds promptly to 'heel', 'sit', 'leave' and 'down' commands will make it easier to cope with the demands of baby, pram and associated baggage.

- Try to take the dog where there are babies and small children - time your walks to coincide with walking past the local school at playtime and perhaps, if possible, go for walks with a friend who has a baby and socialise your dog as much as possible.

- Sound therapy may also be useful, you can download these free from the Dogs Trust website, they aim to help dogs become more relaxed around unusual noises. Obtaining sounds of a baby crying can be helpful to familiarise them to the new sounds they will soon be experiencing.

5. Bringing your baby home

If the baby is born in hospital, whoever brings used baby clothes home to wash, should allow the dog to have a good sniff before they go in the washing machine.

When you arrive home the dog is likely to be very excited. Bring the baby in when the dog has calmed down, tell the dog to sit, and allow him to have a good look. Provided he is OK, don't hurry things, but don't allow him to jump up. If possible, allow him to investigate quietly praising good behaviour and when they back away.

Try not to exclude the dog or keep pushing him away when dealing with your baby. Distract him if necessary, or put him in a controlled 'sit' or 'down' close by if he wants to be there. Create a positive association, so the dog regards the baby as something pleasant - talk to the dog while you are handling the baby and vice versa.

It is important to keep the training going and keep training basic techniques. We only recommend kind, reward based methods of training. Ask yourself the following questions;

- What sort of relationship will I have with my pet when the baby arrives?
- Does your pet have any behavioural problems? If so, they may get worse once the baby arrives and you might want to consider a behaviour referral.
- Are you happy to continue training and to train your dog early on?

Remember—Never leave babies/toddlers or young children unsupervised around any dog, even for a second.

6. Health Concerns

Generally, your dog poses no threat to your baby's health, provided simple hygiene precautions are taken ;

- We recommend de-flea and worming for dogs and cats every 3 months to ensure your pet is not carrying roundworms which can affect humans. Worm eggs do not become infective until 24 hours after being passed, so get into the habit of removing faeces and disposing of them as soon as they are voided.

- Make sure your dog's vaccinations are up to date.

- Avoid letting your dog lick the baby if possible,.

- Do not leave dirty nappies on the floor as dogs will urinate on them or worse, eat them!

- Because of the risk of Toxoplasmosis which may be carried by cats, pregnant women should not handle cat litter trays.

For further information or advice please contact your local practice.