



PREPARING FOR A BABY

Many new parents think that the arrival of a new baby is the time to get rid of the beloved family dog. Please don't make this mistake! Start now, before the baby arrives, getting your dog familiar with baby items. Desensitizing your dog to baby sounds and forthcoming restrictions will help your dog accept this new "sibling."

Avoid Jealousy when Baby Arrives

Your dog, your furry companion, your baby — until you realize that you are expecting a human baby, that is. And suddenly, the hordes of well-meaning friends, neighbors and family members descend upon you with a ton of good advice. Then there's this little gem: "Why don't you get rid of the dog? He's so spoiled, you know he'll be jealous and try to bite the baby."

Whoa! Back the gravy train up here, expectant parents. Before you start calling your local animal control and making arrangements for Brutus, the dog, why not start now and get Brutus used to the fact that he's going to have a baby crawling around soon? It can be done fairly easily and there's no need to remove from your life an animal that's been your best friend through thick and thin (and getting thicker).

First Things First

Obedience Classes

Obedience classes not only ensure that your dog is well behaved but also build a strong foundation of socialization experience. A dog that learns to handle himself in a crowded room filled with other dogs and owners will also handle himself well when baby starts to crawl. Teaching you how to correctly handle your dog as well as teaching your dog what is expected is a necessity in this relationship and having a baby on the way makes this doubly important.



Prepare for Baby's Arrival

You've got a couple of months left before the new baby arrives and your faithful companion is still secure in the knowledge that he is Number One. It's time to get him used to sharing your affection. As with all important desensitization processes, you'll need to start slowly.

If you don't want Pooch in the newly appointed nursery, it's time to start prohibiting access. Start by closing the door at night or when you aren't home. If he ceases to see that room as his territory, he won't be as put out by being "put out." Gradually, add "during playtime" to the restricted access schedule. Then, after a couple of weeks, start keeping him out when you are in the room as well. Once it is firmly established that the nursery is a "no puppy zone," you won't need to worry about Pooch hopping in there to play and you won't have an incensed furball on your hands when you need to put the baby down or change diapers.

Play recordings of a baby cries and other baby noises. Playing these for a little while every day will get your dog used to the sounds and he will start to take them for granted. The volume at which a baby will wail can be distressing for a dog who's never heard it before. I recommend starting them at a low volume then gradually increasing it to a normal level.

When the time is drawing near and you have about four or five weeks left, start to sprinkle baby powder around the house to help your dog get familiar with this new smell. You might also want to start "borrowing" babies from friends, so arrival of this little intruder is not such a big shock. Borrow unwashed baby blankets from the aforementioned friends and let your dog get used to having them lying around. This is also a good way to get him used to not lying on a baby blanket draped along the sofa or chair. If he looks like he's about to get comfortable on a baby blanket on the floor, a firm "Off" and re-direct to an appropriate place will set a pattern and soon he'll be avoiding blankets that may hide a baby in the near future. **Baby's Here! Now What?**

POSITIVE reinforcement is the only thing that will work with a dog with reliable results. Punishing a dog is the worst thing to do; smacking a dog will incite biting and it will also cause your dog to resent your child's presence. (ie: "when she's around, I get in trouble"). Start to reward your dog every time he and the baby are together. He NEEDS to associate the child with GOOD things. Once you've returned home with your new baby your dog may still feel a little jealous — it's perfectly natural to feel a little left out when there's a new arrival — but you can easily reassure your dog that he hasn't been displaced in your affections.

Make it a habit to play with your dog too, even when the baby is out. Pet him while you are feeding the baby or while the baby is on the floor on a blanket. Be careful not to push your dog away when his curiosity gets the better of him and he comes to sniff your new bundle. Ignoring him while the baby is loose will create problems as your dog starts to associate the baby's presence with his neglect.

Some important things to remember

First, please, never ever punish a dog for growling, all it does is teach the dog not to warn before biting. Remember, growling is NOT bad. It's the only way your dog has of warning your child that she's too close or telling you that he's had enough and needs time away.

- Hold the baby, reward the dog.
- Feed the baby, feed the dog.
- Change the baby, reward the dog.

If your dog is rewarded every time he comes near the baby and sits nicely to sniff, it will not be long before the baby becomes the dog's favorite person, next to you.

I know that some days you feel like you just don't have the energy to play with your dog in addition to caring for your new baby but, the extra effort will be worth it as your human child and your dog grow to be inseparable companions in the years ahead.