

Introducing Pets and Babies

1. Remember that your puppy or kitty was your first "baby". He or she is used to receiving all of your attention and, if not properly prepared, may feel a bit bent out of shape when the new arrival comes along. Thankfully, there are several ways you can help your furry friend cope with this major change. Think along the lines of preparing your first child for the birth of your second child.

2. Several months before you are due: Take one or two 6-8 week positive reinforcement based obedience classes. Things like jumping, pawing, and not listening to commands may seem benign now, but they can be annoying and potentially dangerous around an infant. The Canine Good Citizen Test is a great goal for families expecting their first little one. If your dog has ever bitten, snapped or growled for any reason at any person it is best to start seeking the advice of a professional well before the newborn arrives in order to avoid any potentially harmful situations.

See your veterinarian to be sure your pet is up to date on their health exam, vaccinations and parasite checks.

3. Have friends with infants and small children visit and watch how your dog reacts. If she seems afraid, don't force any interaction, let her approach at her own pace. Learn how to read her body language. Consult a positive reinforcement trainer/behaviorist if her anxiety appears excessive. Never leave dogs and children unsupervised.

4. Strive to make positive associations between the baby and your dog or cat well before the actual arrival.

a. Carry a blanket-wrapped doll around the house. Ask your dog to "Sit", then allow your dog to sniff. Praise for all positive interactions. Take the doll with you in a stroller on walks to help your dog get used to the equipment.

b. Use baby lotions and soaps to perfume the air with new scents.

c. Allow your pets to visit the nursery with you. If you would like your pet to remain outside the nursery, install a pet gate. Place double sided sticky tape on objects you do not want kitty jumping up on.

d. Turn on the infant swing, wind up music boxes, play CD's resonating with the cries of newborns (www.preparingfido.com), and set up the crib. All help desensitize your pet to new sights and sounds.

e. Try to include your pet in baby-preparation activities. Practice obedience training at that time.

f. Teach your pet to wait quietly by your side until you invite her onto your lap.

5. After the baby arrives:

a. If you are spending more than one day in the hospital, make sure your pet has somewhere safe and comfortable to stay with someone he or she is familiar with during your absence.

- b. Bring a baby blanket home the day before the little one comes home. Allow your pet to sniff the blanket and give lots of positive reinforcement.
- c. When you come home, take time to greet your pet quietly. Have your spouse or another person bring the new baby into the house.
- d. Try to include your pet in baby-care whenever possible.
- e. Always watch for positive and quiet/calm behavior and reward/reinforce that rather than always focusing on negative behavior. Challenge yourself to reward calm behavior a minimum of three times each day.
- f. Think of ways you can spend quality time with your dog after the baby arrives. If you have done your homework, you now have a calm, well-behaved companion. Teach him some new tricks such as "Fetch me a new diaper". Your goal is to help your pet enjoy his relationship with the new baby as much as possible.