



## Preparing Your Pet for Baby's Arrival

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Helping your pet adjust to the arrival of a new baby is much like preparing a young child for the same event. Handling your pet's curiosity, anxiety and increased insistence for attention may seem like an overwhelming task, in addition to preparing yourself and your household for the baby's arrival. You can, however, help your pet adjust to the big changes ahead with minimal time and effort by making gradual adjustments to your lifestyle before the baby arrives.

### How Will My Pet React?

No matter how much you plan ahead, the addition of a new family member may be difficult for your pet. Remember, your dog or cat was your first "baby" and is used to being the center of attention. So it's understandable that she may experience something akin to sibling rivalry when you introduce a new baby into your house.

You can minimize this feeling by working with her before you bring home your baby. For example, because your baby will demand a lot of time and energy, gradually accustom your dog to spending less time with you. Be sure, however, to ensure your dog is receiving enough exercise prior to and after the baby's arrival, this will help your dog's ability to cope with the decrease in attention. Increase your dog's independent activities, such as feeding him out of food dispensing toys in a room separate from you can help as well. Drastically decreasing attention and frequently scolding, ignoring or isolating your pet when the baby arrives home will likely make your pet feel stressed. If your pet is particularly attached to one family member, other family member(s) should develop a closer relationship with the animal. That way, your pet can still feel loved and provided for while the primary caretaker may be busy with the baby.

### How Can I Prepare My Pet?

Below are several suggestions to make introducing your pet and baby safer and smoother for all. Be sure to carry out these changes months before the baby's arrival to best prepare your pet.

- Take your pet to the veterinarian for a routine health exam and necessary vaccinations.
- Spay or neuter your pet. Not only do sterilized pets typically have fewer health problems associated with their reproductive systems, but they are also calmer and less likely to bite.
- Consult with a veterinarian, pediatrician, and/or animal behavior specialist if the thought of a newborn interacting with your family pet makes you uncomfortable. By working with these experts before your baby is born, you can resolve problems early and put your mind at ease.
- Address any pet training and behavior problems. If your pet exhibits fear and anxiety, now is the time to get help from an animal behavior specialist.
- If your pet's behavior includes gentle nibbling, pouncing or swatting at you or others, redirect that behavior at appropriate objects.

- Get your pet used to nail trims.
- Train your pet to remain calmly on the floor beside you until you have invited him into your lap since your lap will soon be cradling a newborn.
- If your pet is a dog, consider enrolling in a training class and practice training techniques. Training allows you to safely and humanely control your dog's behavior and enhances the bond between the two of you.
- Encourage friends with infants to visit your home to accustom your pet to babies. Supervise all pet and infant interactions.
- Accustom your pet to baby-related noises months before the baby is expected. For example, play recordings of a baby crying, turn on the mechanical infant swing, and use the rocking chair. Make these positive experiences for your pet by offering a treat or playtime.
- If the baby's room will be off-limits to your pet, install a sturdy barrier such as a low baby gate, or a higher one for jumpers. This barrier will still allow your pet to see and hear what's happening in the room, so he'll feel less isolated from the family and more comfortable with the new baby noises.
- Use a baby doll to help your pet get used to the real thing. Carry around a swaddled baby doll, take the doll in the stroller when you walk your dog, and use the doll to get your pet used to routine baby activities, such as bathing and diaper changing.
- Talk to your pet about the baby, using the baby's name if you've selected one.
- Sprinkle baby powder or baby oil on your skin so your pet becomes familiar with the new smells.
- Finally, plan ahead to make sure your pet gets proper care while you're at the birthing center.

## **What Do We Do after the Baby is Born?**

Welcoming a new baby is exciting for your family. Remember when you first brought home your dog or cat? But before you bring your baby home from the hospital, have your partner or friend take home something with the baby's scent (such as a blanket) for your pet to investigate.

When you return home from the hospital, your pet may be eager to greet you and receive your attention. Have someone else take the baby into another room while you give your pet a warm, but calm, welcome. Keep some treats handy so you can distract your pet. After the initial greeting, you can bring your pet with you to sit next to the baby; reward your pet with treats for appropriate behavior. Remember, you want your pet to view associating with the baby as a positive experience. To prevent anxiety or injury, never force your pet to get near the baby, and always supervise any interaction.

Life will no doubt be hectic caring for your new baby, but try to maintain regular routines as much as possible to help your pet adjust. And be sure to spend one on one quality time with your pet each day- it may help relax you, too. With proper training, supervision, and adjustments, you, your new baby, and your pet should be able to live together safely and happily as one (now larger) family.