



Babies and Dogs

by Carole Lawson

The Classic Academy of Canine Learning, LLC

So you're having a baby! What an exciting emotional time! It could be easy to overlook the preparation necessary for introducing a new baby to the "old baby": The dog! Our often pampered best friends (our dogs) will need help adjusting and preparing for the new environment, as will proud moms and dads! There are steps you can consider to help make the transition go as smoothly as possible.



Before Baby Comes Home

The moment you become an expectant parent is the time to start preparing for the new arrival. And if you're a single parent, seek assistance so that someone can help you with the dog preparation and introductions. Specifically, do a self assessment of your current household schedule and how the dog fits in presently. Some items to consider might include:

1) *Does your pet have any present behavior problems? For example:*

Does your pet jump on you, family members, or strangers; steal objects, and/or excessively bark?

Does your dog respond reliably to basic commands such as sit, stay, down, come?

If not, consider obedience classes A.S.A.P. And the dog is never too old to learn!

Has your dog ever exhibited any signs of aggression such as:

Snarls, curling of the lip, growls, nips, raised hackles?

Does your dog have any fears such as:

Noises? Crowds? Events? Strangers?

All of these problems need immediate attention. Through obedience training, both you and your dog can learn skills necessary for your dog to become an acceptable social member of the family. Obedience training provides confidence building for pets and their owners through the building of a relationship based on love, trust and respect that only benevolent leaders are capable of attaining.

2) *How much time do you spend with your pet on a daily basis?*

How will this change with the new arrival?

Remember, even with best of intentions, new babies are time demanding!

What can be done to compensate?

Dogs must still be reinforced as members of the family.

What adjustments can be made now?

Consider interviewing dog walkers, developing games for your dog that are less demanding of your active participation, and other strategies.

3) *What kind of management techniques do you use with your dog?*

Does the dog have free run of the house? Does the dog sleep in your bed with you?

Is the dog allowed on the furniture? Is the pet crate trained?

Consider now if the practices are going to change. If the dog's privileges will change, start working with the dog early on changes before the baby arrives!

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www.classick9academy.com / carolenbru@wowway.com or (216) 272-1995



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4) *Is the dog familiar with baby scents and sounds?*

Get the nursery set up now.

Familiarize the dog with scents (baby powder, lotion, diapers, etc.)

Play tape recordings of baby noises

Buy a doll, apply the baby scents, carrying it around the house and play act!

If the nursery is to be off limits, start boundary training the dog now!

Bringing Baby Home

You will need to prepare for a proper introduction of the new baby to your pet. First and foremost, exercise **caution** and **supervision**. Actually, no matter how well trained and safe you think your pet is, **children and infants should never be left unsupervised with the dog!** **Pets and children do not speak the same language and that often results in misunderstandings.**

After the baby is born, but before coming home, bring a blanket home with the baby scent on it. Let your dog sniff it and get acquainted with the baby smells before the baby's arrival at home!

When bringing the baby home, if your dog is not crate trained, you will probably need some help. Since you have been absent from home for a couple of days, your pet will probably be excited to see you and may even jump - so be prepared! If the dog is crate trained, it should be in the crate prior to your return home on the day that the baby comes home from the hospital. Otherwise, you should walk in the door and have someone else bring the baby in after your initial greeting with the dog. Maintain a low key greeting and only introduce your baby when the dog is calm. Introductions should be done slowly and gradually with the baby initially at a distance, and then slowly increase the proximity between the dog and the baby. Introductions should be stopped prior to the dog becoming overly excited, fearful or displaying other excessive/concerning reactions. Don't force the baby on the dog or the dog into investigating the baby. Dogs should have a kid-free "safe space" to retreat to, such as its crate or a designated area. **Again, seek professional assistance if dog behaviors are of concern.**

You must establish with your pet that the new addition is a "good" thing from the onset. **Teach your dog to associate the baby with positive rewards.** When the baby is around the dog earns attention, treats and toys! Good things occur when the baby is present!

In Summary

What is supposed to be a very joyous time in everyone's life can be joyous, but it takes thought, planning and preparation. Do not wait until two weeks before the baby is born to formulate a plan of action. Start today! In fairness to your dog, the dog has probably been your "baby" for some time now. What might be "culture shock" for your dog can instead be a smooth transition with an organized plan of action. Doing so can result in a dog who is much more bonded to you and confident in you and himself. Teamwork builds confidence and trust spells **SUCCESS!**

IMPORTANT: This information is not provided as professional advice on specific situations. Specific cases should always be directed toward qualified professionals for formal consultation.

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