

## We're Going to Have a Baby!

Having a baby is one of the most exciting times in someone's life! There is so much to do and so much to prepare before the day your baby is born. Unfortunately, in the hustle and bustle of this exciting time, often we forget to include our dog in the preparing process. In an instant, your dog's world as he knows it will be changed forever. Often, the dog goes from the pedestal position of fur-baby to second tier. This can be extremely confusing and threatening for your dog and this is why many dogs end up in rescue after the birth of a child. Usually everything from bed time to meal time to walk and play time is affected by the new baby's arrival. You can make this transition much easier for you and your dog by following some practical advice long before the arrival of your new bundle of joy. By the time your baby arrives, the only thing new to your dog should be the baby herself!

If you haven't already done basic obedience training, now is the time. Your dog should know all the basic commands, including sit, down, stay, no jumping, to come when called, leave it, and how to walk nicely on a leash. If you need some guidance on how to best teach these commands, find a reputable positive-reinforcement trainer in your area. Keep in mind that a typical class will last between six and nine weeks, so get started right away! If you've never crated your dog, this is also a good time to begin crate training. A crate can provide a safe place for your dog to relax when either of you are feeling overwhelmed by the changes that are coming. Begin by putting him in the crate with a tasty treat, such as a stuffed kong, for very short periods of time. As your dog becomes more and more at ease with the crate, gradually increase the length of his confinement. A crate can also come in very handy for baby feeding times, or bath times, when you need 100% of your attention focused on the baby. Another invaluable command to teach your dog will be the quiet command. You will need to be able to prevent and quickly stop barking during baby's nap times.

Now is also time to think about how your dog will get his usual exercise and play when the baby arrives. Will you be able to walk him with the baby in a carrier or a stroller? Is there a dog park where he can go to run? Will another family member take over the exercise routine? If you are anticipating changes to your dog's exercise and play routines, start incorporating those changes now. Having a new baby in the house is just as stressful for your dog as it is for you so ensuring your dog has mental and physical stimulation on a daily basis will be more important than ever. If you are planning to incorporate your dog's daily walk into a family walk with a stroller, be sure to practice this before the baby arrives. Let your dog sniff the stroller but do not let him jump on it. Make sure your dog sees the stroller as a positive, happy thing so be sure to offer lots of praise and even a tasty treat or two when the stroller is around. Now practice walking with you pushing the stroller. For most people, this is very awkward at first because you are no longer holding the leash, but rather pushing the stroller with the leash over one wrist. It will take a few trips to get this new walking style down for you and your dog as he will no longer be able to freely move from side to side – there will be a stroller blocking the way! Imagine how much more difficult this would be with a baby in the stroller! Get started now so your dog understands his new walk routine before the baby arrives.

A baby means lots and lots of new, unfamiliar things. Set out the things your baby will need - the baby seat, a swing, baby toys, baby blankets, high chair. Be sure to associate positives with these objects in the form of praise and a tasty treat every now and then. Put the lotion or powder you'll be using on your own hands and let your dog get used to the scent. Get a recording of a crying baby and play it softly while practicing your obedience. Increase the volume as time goes on in preparation for the real thing coming home. If you have family members with small children, see that he is exposed to them often and be sure that exposure is a positive experience. If you have a friend with a baby, invite her to visit. You might even get a baby sized doll to cradle, carry around and talk to. This is a good way to prepare him for the time when he's going to need to share your attention and for you to begin to show him that he's not losing you, but that you expect him to behave in a certain way. It will also help you understand what your dog's specific concerns might be. Your dog's senses of both hearing and smell are much more sensitive than your own so help prepare him for the sights, smells and sounds of a new baby long before the real thing arrives!

All that preparation for the past few months has hopefully paid off. Now the big day is here and you are off to the hospital to deliver that wonderful bundle of joy! Wait! Who's going to feed the dog? Make sure your hospital plans also include plans to keep your dog fed, let out and exercised while you are in the hospital. While you're at the hospital with your new arrival, have a family member bring home a blanket that your baby has been wrapped in. This will be your first opportunity to expose him to the real scent of the new family member so make sure the blanket is presented with lots and lots of praise and love! On the day you come home, it will be natural for your dog to want to greet you after your absence. Ask someone else to hold your new baby while you greet your dog. Once your dog has settled down from the initial greetings, hold your baby in your lap. Ask him to sit and stay while you let him see and smell the baby. No harm will come if he licks the baby! If your dog seems to be getting stressed by all the first-day-home commotion, put him in his crate for a short time with a bone or special treat that can keep him occupied. Don't leave him there for an extended period of time, especially when the baby first comes home. He needs to know that he's still important to you.

Just like a first child when the second one comes, a dog may break housebreaking rules for a short time after the baby comes. Dogs may consider the baby as a new littermate who soils all over the house and they may start to do it too. To discourage this, be sure not to leave diapers lying around and be sure to clean up as carefully as you did in the early days when you were housebreaking your dog. If you do experience housebreaking problems, do the same things you did when you first brought our dog home - limit areas of access, take him outside immediately when you see that he's soiled something, praise him for doing his business outside. Also remember not to be harsh with your dog if he does have accidents, or forgets some of his other training. This is a very stressful time for your dog! Just remind your dog of what is proper and acceptable through praise and rewards and in no time he'll figure out what the correct behaviors are.

As long as you're able to act relaxed and happy when your dog is in the house with the new baby, it shouldn't take long for him to accept the new family member. If you're very stressed by the arrival of your baby, your dog will pick up on this although he may not be sure where the stress is coming from. Your dog can be an enormous stress reliever - let him be that for you. It is important to carve out at least a little one-on-one time for you and your dog each day so your dog stills knows how important he is to you. Your dog wants you to be the leader of his pack and can accept your new baby and be as devoted to him as he is to you. With some planning ahead, your new baby can be a wonderful addition to your pack for both you and your dog.