

INTRODUCING A NEW BABY AND A DOG



A new baby in your home is reason for great joy and excitement. It can also be an exciting time for your dog. Here are some guidelines to provide a smooth transition for your dog as you introduce the newest member of your family. The Humane Society of Atlantic County recommends that you never leave any dog unsupervised with an infant or child.

1. BEFORE THE BABY COMES:

? Get your pet used to a regular, realistic schedule that will be kept when the new baby is present. Start the feeding and walking schedule that your dog will experience once the baby comes.

? Schedule several short periods of time when you will attend only to your pet. Make this time part of your daily routine. This is quality time for your pet to interact with you. Use this time to pet, play with, massage, groom, talk to or belly-scratch your dog. You may find that this time is also relaxing for you.

? Start obedience training now if you haven't already done so. Sign up for obedience training or hire a private trainer to come to your home. Choose trainers who use reward-based training methods. Get your family involved. Start a leash-walking schedule that you will maintain with the baby. Teach or brush up on loose-leash walking. Invest the time now so that your well-behaved dog can walk comfortably with you in public. Take your dog out with a doll inside a baby carriage or stroller, or wear a backpack or papoose with a doll inside. Practicing this now will allow you more freedom with your dog, and your dog will learn that he/she gets to go on fun walks with the new baby.

? Minimize attention-seeking behavior now. Ignore your dog's unsolicited request for petting, treats or attention. Practice Sit and Lay Down before rewarding with attention or treats. Teach your dog not to jump up. If your dog has a habit of pawing at you, or barking at you for attention, ignore this behavior by getting up and going away. Several seconds later you can come back, ask your dog to Sit or Lay Down and then reward the dog by petting or offering a treat. Once your dog realizes that pawing at you or barking isn't getting him anywhere, the behavior will decrease significantly. Practice your verbal commands often so your dog gets used to responding to your voice alone.

? Set up the baby's sleeping and diaper changing area as soon as possible. Start using baby lotion, baby powder, diaper cream and baby objects now. Let your dog explore these things by sniffing them. Do not let your dog put his mouth on or drag away any of the objects. Teach your dog to Leave It (which means don't pick it up) or Drop It (which means drop what is already in his mouth). Make sure the diaper pail is well out of reach and securely closed.

? Do not let the dog sleep on any of the baby furniture. Put a baby/puppy gate up at the nursery doorway so that your dog can get used to it being there. Allow your dog supervised access to the nursery or baby area.

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? Think about where your dog currently rides in your car and where the baby car seat will go....make any necessary changes now. If you have an SUV, consider getting the bar gates for the back that will prevent your dog from climbing over to the back seat where the baby will be. If you have a sedan type vehicle, how will you manage the dog and the baby in the car?

? Make sure your dog's toys are not similar to baby toys. Stick to rawhides, rubber bones, marrow bones and tennis balls, and stay away from cuddly, stuffed animals. If your dog is used to stuffed toys, save a few for special occasions but start switching your dog over to non-baby type toys now. Put your dog's toys away when he/she is not playing with them, in his own toy box, and bring them out often when you interact with your dog. Now is another good time to practice Drop It, by teaching your dog to drop his/her toy in exchange for something better (like a favorite treat or a better toy).

? If your dog sleeps unrestrained in your room where the baby will stay, start getting your pet used to sleeping restrained in some way, using a tether to the foot of your bed, or in a crate by your side. If your dog has free roam of the house at night, consider what restraining methods you might use when the baby comes, and start introducing them now. If your dog knows Stay, continue to use it and be prepared to reinforce it. If not, then start teaching your dog now. Consider setting up baby/puppy gates so your dog can get used to them. You need to know now whether your dog can jump over a standard baby gate. Try using a harness and tie-out, or tethering your dog on a leash to a heavy piece of furniture, for short periods of time, and reward profusely for good behavior. Never leave your dog confined for a long period of time.

2. WHEN THE BABY IS BORN:

? Have your spouse (or whomever is caring for the pet at that time) take home some articles of clothing that the baby has used. Your dog will learn that new clothing smells are part of the routine with a new infant. Allow your dog to smell these items and reward for good behavior. Do not let your dog run around with them in his mouth.

? If you will have a neighbor or pet sitter care for your dog during your hospital stay, arrange for the new caregiver to start his or her duties several weeks before the baby is born. Ideally, your dog should stay in the home and not be kenneled or taken to someone else's house, but if that is not possible, arrange for the dog to make trips to the temporary lodging before the baby comes. This will help to reduce your dog's stress level.

3. WHEN THE BABY COMES HOME:

? When you come home with the baby, you will need help. Someone should hold the baby while you go in and greet your dog. You have been missed, and you should be able to greet your pet and pay attention to him/her without telling them to go away, or having them inadvertently jump on you while you are holding the baby. Having a dog that doesn't jump will come in handy...otherwise, someone else might need to hold your dog on leash while you say hello.

? During the greeting process, someone else should hold the baby and keep him/her out of the way of your dog. You should only introduce your dog to the baby once the initial excitement of having you home again has subsided.

4. HOW TO INTRODUCE THE BABY:

? You are now ready to introduce your dog to the new baby. Have someone else sit down comfortably on the couch with the baby. Make sure that your dog is leashed and allow your dog to smell the baby and explore. If your pet seems fearful, take a few steps back and speak calmly to your pet and offer a piece of baby's clothing for your dog to smell. Give your dog lots of praise and even a special treat if you wish. Do not dangle the baby in front of your dog under any circumstances.

? Remember to be calm at all times. Keep your leash secure, but loose. Most people would not permit their dog to lick the baby, so make this decision ahead of time. Use your Leave It command if any attempt at licking occurs. If there is any growling, however slight, remove your dog from the area. Do not reprimand your dog for growling. Give your dog some time to adjust and allow him to sniff the baby's clothes or blanket. You may try the introductions again. If you feel your dog has behaved inappropriately, do not try to console or comfort him/her. If your dog's behavior is persistently tense, aggressive or inappropriate, please seek professional

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behavioral assistance for you and your dog.

5. HOW TO ADVANCE SUCCESSFULLY IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN YOUR PET AND BABY:

? For the first few weeks, when you are alone with your pet and the baby, keep your pet comfortably confined or restrained. You can use a harness and tie-out, short leash attached to heavy furniture, baby gates, or whatever your pet is used to. Sooner or later you will be nursing the baby, typing on the computer and answering the phone all at the same time and you need to know that your dog is comfortably secure.

? If your dog accepts the baby without any untoward behavior during the first few weeks, you can try unleashed supervision. Share the responsibilities of rewarding and caring for your dog with your family or friends. Your dog needs to be reassured that good things come from everyone in the family. Under no circumstances should your dog be left unsupervised with your baby or child. Even if your dog does not have aggressive behavior, a strong dog could unintentionally cause injury to a baby or small child.

? If your dog is not a hazard (tripping, falling, jumping, grabbing, etc), responds well to your voice commands and is truly being social, allow your dog to accompany you on feedings, baths and diaper changing. This helps to further strengthen the bond between your dog and your child, and helps to teach your child humane behavior around pets.

? Never allow your pet to sleep in the same room with your child. If your dog sleeps unrestrained in your room or is used to free roam of the house, make sure the baby gates are secure, use a baby monitor and keep your pet confined in some way so the baby's space is always pet-free.

? Never leave your dog unsupervised with your infant or child. Young children are often uncoordinated and can inadvertently hurt a pet. This is especially important if your dog has an arthritic condition or some other painful medical problem.

? Teach your children to treat your dog gently: no pulling, pushing, tugging, squeezing or pounding on the dog.

We hope these guidelines will help you develop a wonderful long-lasting relationship between your child and your dog. Appropriate pet-child behavior can be a wonderful experience and can help children develop humane and socially well-adjusted behavior. If you are having difficulty with your pet around your children, please seek professional behavioral assistance.

The Humane Society of Atlantic County works with two canine obedience instructors who are well versed in behavior management. Please contact the shelter directly or email pal4life@comcast.net for more information.

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