



# Preparing for a New Baby

For new parents, welcoming a child to the family is a very exciting time!

Your whole world is going to change – less time to yourself, changed routines and new responsibilities are just the start. Your world will now revolve around that special new baby.

All of these changes will affect the relationship that you have with your pets. You may find it harder to find time to spend with them away from the baby, or you may struggle to find time to play with them or take them for walks like you used to.

The changes leading up to the birth, and after the arrival of the new baby, can have quite a negative impact on your pets especially if they previously spent a large part of their time with you enjoying one-on-one attention, living in the house, and accompanying you everywhere.

However, you can minimise the effects of the new baby's arrival by planning ahead and preparing your pets for life after the baby arrives.

This may mean slowly transitioning to the new routine, training new behaviours ahead of time, and thinking about ways to ensure that your pet's welfare is not impacted when you have less time to spend with them.

## **Eat, Sleep, Live**

One of the first things you will need to consider is where your dog will live, eat and sleep once the baby arrives.

Will he still have access to the house, or will he be outside? Will he be fed inside or outside? Will he have access to some areas and not to others?

You will need to discuss your expectations and formulate a plan that everyone in the family can agree to.



If your dog currently sleeps on your bed or in your room, and you plan to have him sleep outside in a kennel or garage, this is going to be a very big change for him. Similarly, if he has had free range to the entire house, and you now have decided not to let him into the nursery or bedrooms, he will have to learn to sit patiently in another area when you go into those areas.

You may need to think about purchasing and fitting safety gates, child barriers, door locks, a crate, or even a kennel or run for outside. The sooner you make these changes, the sooner you can begin training your pet to accept the new routine.

***Take things gradually, set your dog up for success and remember to reward good behaviour when it happens.***



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## Teaching your dog what is expected

Dogs can be quite intuitive, but they certainly do not come with a good knowledge of human etiquette and expectations. For this reason, it is up to us to teach our dogs what we expect them to do in any given circumstance.

Dogs are naturally attracted to food and smells, so a new baby may be something they will be very interested in and will want to approach them to sniff and smell.

By now you should have worked out what your likely routine will be once the baby comes home – feeding, changing, sleeping etc. If this is your first baby, you may want to have a chat with a child health nurse, or with family and friends who have young children so that you have a good idea of what to expect, especially during the first few months.

You need to think about what you want the dog to be doing during the various activities – Will he sit on his bed? Be locked in another part of the house? Or maybe it will be a time he will be put outside?

***All dogs need to have a certain level of 'manners training', maybe now is the time to enrol in a refresher course at the local training class.***

Your dog will need to respond to some basic cues such as 'Down', 'Come' as well as other useful cues such as: 'Outside', 'On your Mat' and 'Settle'.

You may want to take time to teach your dog to sit quietly in a crate so that he can safely be inside the house, or you may want to teach him to politely stand still (or sit) when greeted rather than jump up for a pat.

It is possible to teach your dog any behaviour as long as you are patient and break the final result down into smaller, achievable steps. From our understanding of learning theory, we know that a behaviour that is rewarded will be more likely to occur again, so we can use small food treats, attention, pats/cuddles or games with a favourite toy to train the behaviour we want.

You will need work slowly towards your goal behaviour, rewarding progress through the steps along the way. Be patient and try to spend a little time everyday training the behaviours you want.

Remember to keep training sessions short and positive - a few short sessions each day will get you there faster than one long session. If you are having trouble, or need some guidance, you may need to book some sessions with a reputable trainer who can help you with manners training.

You will have to think about what you want your dog to do whilst you are feeding or changing the baby's nappy.

It is not enough to say 'I want the dog to leave us alone and not bounce all over us' you need to decide what it is the dog should be doing. For example, you may train the dog to lie quietly in his crate whilst you change the nappy, or you might want him to lie quietly on his mat whilst you feed the baby on the couch.

Even simple requests such as 'Outside' or 'Leave it' need to be coached so the dog understands what you mean and is more likely to respond to these requests when there are distractions.

More complex behaviours such as 'On your Mat' or 'Stay' take a while to reach a level where they are useful to a new parent, so you will need to get a good head start on some training.



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Once your dog is reliably responding to your requests, you should also practice getting the dog to do them whilst you carry and nurse a doll or similar as this adds to the distraction, and also forces you to consider how you will be able to manage the dog's behaviour when your hands are full.

You may also want to practice walking the dog beside a moving pram and concentrate on 'loose-leash' walking so the dog does not pull away from you in all directions.

Another important thing to work on is rewarding calm behaviour at all times. When you have a new baby or even a toddler in the house, you are not going to want the dog to be silly or excitable, or to race around the house.

Dogs obviously need some outlet for their energy, and you will have to find some time for a game or walk/run, but at other times coach calm behaviours such as 'Lie Down' and 'Settle'.

Take time to reward any calm behaviour with small food treats and a calm pat. The more calm behaviour you reward, the more likely your dog is to display calm behaviour (something you will be pleased to have when the baby arrives).

***You may like to source a recording of baby and children's noises to play to your dog.***

Babies cry and make a host of unusual noises and it may help to have the dog experience these well in advance.

You can start by playing the noises at a low volume until the dog appears comfortable with them then slowly bring them up to regular volume, taking care not to frighten the dog.

Some dogs are very noise-sensitive, and will need some time to adjust to the new noises, so take it slowly and pair a fun activity with the recording.

You can also practice having the sounds come from the baby's room or cot, so the dog gets used to the sound coming from a different place.

## **As the Day approaches...**

As the arrival of the baby starts to draw close, you will need to think about other important things such as who will care for the dog whilst you are in hospital, and who will exercise it if you can't (i.e. if you need a caesarean section).

Often family and friends can be called on to assist during this very busy time. If you can relax about the dog, you can concentrate on the baby's arrival.

***Once the baby is born, you can also take home some items with the baby's scent on them.***

Dogs live in a world rich in scent and smell, and this will give the dog time to adjust to the smells of the new child before mum and bub are discharged from the hospital.

Being prepared, and thinking ahead will make the transition much smoother when baby finally comes home....and sets your pets up for success!

