



# Introducing a New Baby to the Family

Bringing your baby home is a very stressful time for any new parent. Everything seems different and you may not be getting a lot of sleep with all the excitement. Your focus will naturally be on your new child and settling him or her into life at home.

At the same time, you are going to want to make sure that your existing pets still get everything they need to stay happy and healthy, and that the introduction of the new baby does not negatively impact their welfare.

***Please see our Fact Sheet on preparing for a new baby if you need more help with things you need to consider BEFORE bringing your new baby home.***

On the day you first come home, your dog will be very excited to see you after an absence and maybe a little more animated than usual.

For this reason, it is probably a good idea to greet the dog without the baby in your arms. Maybe another family member can hold onto bubs whilst you say hello, or the dog can be safely housed outside until you are settled, then you can go out and greet him.

Your pet is going to be understandably interested in the baby – it makes strange noises and interesting smells. If the dog is going to be inside the house, it may be a good idea to refresh your training with the baby present and even safer to have the dog securely on leash to start with.

We want the dog to view the arrival and presence of the baby as one of the best things in its life, rather than seeing the baby as competition for your affection.

One strategy is to pair the presence of the baby with all of the good things in the dog's life - food, treats, games and attention. This helps to make the baby's presence a positive thing.



Whenever you are holding the baby or the baby is nearby, you can reward the dog with really high-value treats that he does not get at other times – maybe reinforcing behaviours such as 'Drop' or 'On Your Mat'.

This not only pairs the baby with the treats but also helps constantly reinforce calm and settled behaviour.

Even though the first few weeks are a very busy time - lots of visitors, the demands of a new baby, recovering from the birth, and trying to find time to sleep – you still need to try to find some one-on-one time to spend with your dog. This may be a great job for other family members – they can take the dog for walks or to the park or even play a game in the backyard.



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If your dog is going to spend more time than normal outside, alone, you will need to spend some time enriching his environment so that he is occupied with activities.

Food-releasing devices and chew toys can provide hours of entertainment and challenge. Try to rotate toys regularly, and only have a few out at a time, so that your dog remains interested in them.

There are some great ideas for preparing treats that take time to eat, and toys such as the 'Kong' toy can be stuffed tightly as the dog gains experience.

***Be aware that some dogs can be quite possessive of their toys and chews, so make sure you clean them up and put them away before children play in the yard!***

If you have more than one dog, you will also need to be careful not to cause fights over toys and high-value food items!

In the early weeks, the baby is unable to move about unassisted, although it may kick its legs, wave its arms and wiggle. Supervision of the dog is essential, and tools such as baby gates can be used to restrict access to various areas where the baby may be.

Your dog should not be able to access your child's sleeping or resting areas unsupervised, so you will need to have a foolproof system of shutting doors or closing barriers.

If this is not possible, the dog will need to be enclosed in a crate or put outside when you cannot directly supervise – NEVER leave a dog alone with a baby, even for a few seconds!

Watch your dog's body language constantly for signs of stress or arousal. Dogs give subtle signals about how they are feeling, and it is up to us to see them and deal with the situation accordingly.

In most cases, moving the dog to another area, or giving it a time out in his crate will allow him to settle down and return to a relaxed state.

## **Baby on the move.....**

As your baby grows, it won't be long before he starts to become mobile. Exploring the floor becomes his new hobby as his motor skills develop. At this time, the challenges presented become different, and the movement will increase the dog's interest in the baby.

For some dogs, this movement may stimulate their prey instincts, and you need to be very careful that your dog remains calm and does not become aroused.

Now more than ever, supervision is vital. It may be safest to have the dog safely confined, or outside during the baby's busy times.

If the dog does not seem aroused and remains calmly on his mat, it may be safe to have him with you in the room but watch his body language closely for any changes.

Don't be surprised if your baby crawls straight for the dog. The dog will become interesting to the baby too.

As the baby approaches, you will need to watch your dog's body language super closely and be ready to step in if he looks uncomfortable with the baby's approach.

You can teach your dog to move away on cue, giving him the option to go elsewhere and don't forget to continue to use food treats to reward calm behaviour. You will need to keep your eyes on both the baby and the dog at this age.

They should certainly never be left together, even for a few seconds, as the baby will be able to move quite quickly by this stage, and could rush over to the dog before you can react.



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## The Toddler years.....

Once your baby becomes more and more mobile, the challenges of managing a dog and a toddler increase another notch. Toddlers are uncoordinated and can move erratically. Their balance is developing, and it is not uncommon for them to reach out and grab things if they lose their balance.

They are starting to explore with their hands and mouth, have limited control of the strength of their grasp, and can be quite rough. All of this can potentially lead to problems as the dog becomes the target of some not-so-pleasant physical interaction.

Toddlers are not yet able to reason and think about the consequences of their actions. Over a number of years, repeated coaching and teaching can result in a child who is confident and caring around pets, but this requires a concerted effort on behalf of their parents.

From the dog's point of view, toddlers are right at eye level, and they often give direct eye contact – something that can be quite threatening to a dog!



When they greet the dog, they may want to 'hug' it which can be frightening. Add to this they can be persistent, and do not see or read the body language cues that the dog may be giving, and you have a recipe for disaster.

Dog bite statistics tell us that this is the age that children are most likely to be the victims of a serious dog bite and due to their height, the bites are often to the face area, leaving permanent physical and mental scarring.

At this age, you may find that your dog needs to spend more time outside, or in its crate. Remember, that a dog that is outside will need lots of things to do, and plenty of physical and mental exercise to compensate for the lower level of interaction with its humans.

***Having the dog physically separated from your toddler when you are not able to supervise is the best way to prevent accidents from happening.***

When they are together, you will need to supervise every interaction, coaching and teaching your toddler the correct way to interact with your dog, and rewarding the dog for remaining calm and relaxed.

It may be an idea to spend some time desensitising your dog to awkward touching and patting – pairing a favourite food treat with the acceptance of a slightly rough pat. This will need to be repeated over and over, slowly increasing the roughness of the touch as the dog learns to look at this kind of touch as something that earns it a yummy reward.

Remember that it is unreasonable to expect any dog to tolerate repeated rough handling, grabbing and holding, poking and prodding, or toddlers climbing onto them.



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***It is your job to protect your dog and ensure your toddler does not behave in a way that is unreasonable.***

Make sure the dog has an area where it can go to relax and escape the toddler. You will need to teach your child that when the dog goes to his bed or crate, or if he is sleeping, not to bother the dog.

They should be taught not to stick their fingers into the dog's crate, or through the baby gates (sometimes, having two baby gates can better separate dog and child).

Toddlers can be very persistent, and they do not understand when the dog has had enough, so watch for signs that your dog is no longer enjoying the company of your toddler and move him to a quieter area.

Supervision at this age is critical. You cannot leave them alone for a minute. You also have to be very careful that the toddler does not climb over barriers or open doors and follow the dog as children of this age can be quite determined and are now physically active.

Try to include the toddler and the dog in quiet, controlled activities such as walks to the park (dog on lead of course), training (the toddler can help train the dog with a parent's supervision), and games with the dog that do not lead to too much excitement, and that the dog plays politely (maybe 'fetch' or hide and seek).

If your toddler is having friends over for a play session, it is probably safer for your pet to be locked up safely away from the children.

Other people's children may not have been trained how to behave around dogs and the play can get

excited and out of hand quickly. It is safer both for the children AND for the pet that a quiet, out-of-reach area is set aside for the dog.

***Once again supervision is paramount!***