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HOW TO INTRODUCE YOUR DOG TO A BABY



So you are aware that there is going to be change in the household soon, your dog is probably used to being the centre of attention. A new baby is a major change to your household. Luckily, there are many ways that you can prepare your dog to make the disruption to your household minimal.

The information within this fact sheet is aimed at dogs with a well-balanced character. If your dog has shown any aggression towards people or attention seeking behaviours, these will need to be addressed on their own. We would suggest that you seek professional advice to reduce these behaviours prior to the arrival of the baby.

It is important to ensure that the following tips are implemented as early as possible to ensure the change to the dog's lifestyle is a steady process. This helps the dog to cope with the changes gradually and not associate them with the new baby's arrival.

It is best to ensure that your dog is medically sound, up to date with vaccinations, flea treatment and worming. It is also a good idea to inform your midwife that you have a dog.

Prior to the baby arriving (in the home)

Work on basic training - knowing how to sit, lie down and go to bed are all good commands to have in place. Your dog will also need to be able to settle on their own and be able to cope with being ignored for a period of time. If you are planning to restrict the access the dog has to the house once the baby has arrived then this is something you need to start to implement straight away, including not allowing access to where the baby will be sleeping at night.

If your dog enjoys playing with toys, encourage a drop or other 'relinquish command' and start to have toys around that the dog is not allowed to interact with. You might decide that you are only going to play with your dog in certain areas, as when your new baby arrives they may be spending time on the floor, so this helps your dog to learn that the playing will be required elsewhere. Some baby toys can make unfamiliar sounds so having these around from early on can help your dog to adjust to the noises they are likely to make.

Introduce the dog to the new items of furniture that a child is likely to need such as a play mat, carry cot, high chair etc. This allows the dog to investigate the items and become familiar to them prior to them being in use.



Having smells that are likely to be around once the baby has arrived is useful, as it allows your dog to get used to familiar scents, for example baby wipes.

You can get CDs that have sounds of children and babies, these will help your dog get used to the noises that the baby is likely to make. This should prevent these sounds being a shock for them the first time they hear them. When playing them for the first time, keep them on a low volume and increase this as the dog appears more comfortable with the noises.

Once the baby arrives it can be an exciting time for all your family and friends and is likely to be a time when the household is very busy. It might be an idea to see if some family and friends are willing to come around prior to the baby arriving so that your dog gets used to more visitors.

It is important to ensure that this training is started as early as possible to ensure the change to the dog's lifestyle is a gradual process. This helps the dog to adjust over a period of time and not associate the sudden change with the new baby's arrival.

Prior to the baby arriving (out of the home)

Having good control of your dog when out is always a good idea but will be extremely useful once the baby has arrived. Being able to walk calmly on a lead and be responsive to your voice will make it much easier when walking with the baby in the pushchair or sling. If your dog is used to long walks across uneven ground then a sling might be a beneficial purchase to carry your baby, as you will have your hands free to deal with your dog and all that they may need.

Getting your dog used to the pushchair from early on is also a good idea, as initially this could be a very unfamiliar object to them. Allowing them the time to sniff and investigate while in the house. Taking them for walks with it will also make the process when baby arrives much smoother when the baby arrives.

Once the baby is home it can be a busy time for everyone. Therefore it might be a good idea to ensure your dog's space and bed are away from visitors and monitor how they are coping with all the noise and excitement. Encouraging friends and family to meet you and go for a walk instead can be a calmer time for everyone concerned.

It is very important to make sure that your dog sees the arrival of your new baby as a positive experience; it is up to you if you would like to get into the house and settle your new baby in first. Ideally you need to allow the dog to meet the new baby as early as you feel ready. Allow them to approach the baby appropriately and gently and let them safely investigate the baby, initially giving lots of praise and reward when this happens.

Never shout or scream at the dog as this will create a negative association between the dog and the baby and give him a feeling of anxiety. Instead, show the dog the appropriate behaviours such as sit and reward him when he does what you desire. You can reward with food when your dog is behaving appropriately around your baby.

