



Enhancing the bond between dogs and their families

Preparing Your Puppy for the Arrival of Your New Baby

A new addition to the family can be a big change for any dog, especially when that addition is a newborn baby. Suddenly, your puppy is no longer the center of attention! Much like an older sibling, the puppy needs to learn to share attention with the newest member of the household. While it's unlikely that your puppy would intentionally try to harm your baby, she will not automatically know how to behave around a newborn. It will take some patience and coaching on your part to help her learn to be gentle around this new family member.

Rather than wait until the baby has arrived, you will be doing your puppy and yourselves a great service by preparing for your baby's arrival ahead of time. There are a number of things you can do to make the transition as easy as possible for everyone involved, particularly your puppy.

Think about what will change when the baby arrives and make a list. Some ideas: your routine, your amount of free time, the amount of play time and walks the puppy receives, new noises and smells, and new toys, blankets and other items around the house that are not play toys for your puppy.

You will be spending a lot of time holding your baby when you cannot be paying attention to your puppy and certainly don't want her jumping up on you. You will most likely have visitors coming over to see the new baby and not giving their sole attention to your puppy. These are all things you can help your puppy learn to accept before the baby arrives.

You will undoubtedly have less time to dote on and spend with your puppy once the baby arrives. Help her adjust to this gradually. If she is the center of attention one day, and suddenly this new arrival receives all of the attention, she will not understand what has happened. Dogs do not experience anger and jealousy the way people do, but she will have a hard time dealing with a big upset in her routine. Help her to become accustomed to more alone time. Make sure she has plenty of interactive toys to play with by herself. Try to set aside special time just for her. Consider taking her to doggy day care or setting up play dates with friends or neighbors so she can play with other dogs.

Start acquiring some baby blankets, toys, diapers, etc. before the baby arrives – and as soon as possible. Start getting your dog used to having items lying around the house now, so you can teach her that these are not playthings for her. If you happen to know someone else with a baby, see if you can take her for a visit so she can experience some of these new



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smells that she will experience when your baby arrives. She will undoubtedly be very interested in those poopy diapers!

Use something wrapped in a baby blanket – preferably as lifelike a baby doll as you can find – maybe even one that cries! Practice your routine with the new “baby” – feeding, holding, etc. Teach your puppy not to jump on you when holding this new “baby” and most definitely not to nip or grab the blanket you are holding.

She will also be hearing lots of new noises – babies crying, laughing, etc. Consider purchasing a CD of baby sounds that you can play and start acclimating her to these noises. Start with the volume fairly low, and then gradually increase it. If she begins to think these are normal household sounds, they will not be such a change to her when the baby comes home.

Consider the ways in which you will change your behaviors. Will you speak differently? Do you use your happy voice or baby talk with your puppy now? Is this the same voice you will use with your new baby? If so, you might want to start practicing now. Let your puppy know that because you are using a different than normal voice, it does not always mean you are speaking to her. How will she know when you are speaking to her?

Will you change your routine? Dogs like consistency, structure and routine. Start altering your routine now so it's not such a big deal when the baby arrives. I probably can't talk you into getting up several times in the middle of the night to pretend to feed a baby, but make as many changes as you can before that time comes!

Will you have a nursery or separate room for the baby? Will your dog be allowed in that room? If not, make sure it is off limits now and not suddenly only off limits when the baby arrives.

Start to associate treats, toys and other rewarding items with these new changes. We want your puppy to associate this new baby with lots of positives and not make her think this new arrival is taking away all of her fun. Give her a Kong toy filled with goodies to work on while you sit and pretend to feed your new baby. Teach her that the trash can with poopy diapers is off limits. Teach her that the new toys are not hers. Redirect her to her own toys, and teach her “leave it” with the new toys. Try not to leave baby items on the floor. If toys are on the floor, she will see them as dog toys and therefore fair game. Don't be upset with her if she runs off with baby items within easy reach of her. That would not be fair to her. Simply work on your object exchanges and redirect her to her own toys.

What else will change? Will she have to share the backseat of your vehicle with the new baby? If you are not currently using a travel crate in your vehicle, you might want to consider using one. Or use a doggie seat belt or barrier to separate her from the baby when traveling. Remember how sharp puppy teeth and nails can be. You don't want her climbing over or nipping your baby because they don't have separate traveling space in your vehicle.



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Is your puppy allowed on the furniture now? Will she still be allowed on the furniture when the baby arrives? If you are planning to change any of her rules, do it now. If your dog will still be allowed on the furniture, she might need to learn that she must first be invited to join you if you are sitting on the furniture.

How about walks? Will she still be taken for her usual walks when the baby arrives? If so, start practicing with the stroller now. Place your pretend baby in a stroller and take her for a walk. Your neighbors might think you are a bit strange, but it will give them something to gossip about over dinner! Explain to them what you are doing and invite them to help you. Invite friends and neighbors to come and say "hello" to your new "baby." Your puppy might need to wait for a bit of attention, whereas, before she was the first to receive attention. Enlist help in practicing this in the home as well as on walks.

Once the new baby has arrived, try to bring home a blanket with your baby's smell on it into the house first. Introduce your puppy to this new smell first, and associate it with something really good. Then bring your baby in, and again associate the baby with something really good. Remember to associate your baby and everything that goes along with a new baby with good things! Be sure to reward quiet, calm behavior around this smell and around the new baby when he or she arrives.

Consider other changes that will occur when the baby starts to grow, starts to crawl, starts to eat solid food, etc. Plan ahead and help your puppy to prepare for these things in advance and you will have a much happier puppy and fewer chances of any problems.

It's an exciting and busy time! Do everything you can to help your puppy enjoy the changes as well!

