

Bringing Home Baby: A Step by Step Guide

Congratulations on your newest edition to your family!! This is a guide to help with the introduction of your new bundle of joy to your family dog, a common source of worry and questions for families

Pregnancy preparations

1. Take your dog into the veterinarian BEFORE the baby comes. Ensure that he is up to date on vaccinations and is in good general health.
2. Gradually minimize the time you spend with your dog before bringing home the baby, so he gets more accustomed to the fact that you will not be able to give him unlimited attention.
3. If possible, have another family member try to develop a closer relationship to your dog, especially if he is very attached to the future Mom and Dad,.
4. Teach your dog to sit and not jump up, as this is especially important training to have prior to bringing home your baby.
5. If your dog already exhibits stress and anxious behaviors, NOW is the time to see your veterinarian or veterinary behaviorist and get at the root of the problem.
6. Has your dog ever interacted with a baby or children? If not, talk with your veterinarian for tips on how to safely monitor his reactions. Look for any inappropriate behaviors, such as signs of aggression like barking or growling, as well as any anxious behaviors like whining or pacing.
7. Allow your dog to become familiar with the baby room and baby "smells". You may also want to start sprinkling baby powder and lotion onto your skin, since dogs normally rely so much on their sense of smell.
8. While it is important that the dog gets used to the baby's new room, ensure that he does not sleep on the baby's furniture or play with the baby's toys. Reward him with treats and clearly distinguish non-baby toys for him to play with.
9. Practice laying a towel on floor (as if you were changing the baby's diaper or playing with the baby), and have your dog "stay" without approaching until called. Once he does this behavior correctly, make sure you give lots of positive reinforcement. To make this exercise even more realistic, you can buy a baby doll so your dog is more accustomed to the idea that there will be a little person lying on that towel.
10. You can purchase a soundtrack or download sounds of baby "noises", such as babies crying and screaming, so your dog is used to these new sounds beforehand.
11. Some dogs are anxious about things that roll or may try to bite at wheels, so if you plan to take family walks, start walking your dog with the stroller before your baby is born. If your dog seems afraid of the stroller or chases wheels, start by walking your dog very slowly on-leash next to the stroller. Reward your dog with a favorite treat if he is able to walk next to the stroller without reacting.

Actual introductions and afterwards:

1. Never EVER leave ANY dog unattended with a young child without direct supervision of both the dog and the child by a responsible adult. PERIOD.
2. If at any time you are uncomfortable about the situation, KEEP YOUR DOG SEPARATED FROM YOUR BABY AND CONTACT YOUR VETERINARIAN.
3. If you have a hospital birth, have a plan for dog care (least stressful for your dog) when the whole household leaves to the hospital.
4. Make sure both you and your dog is calm prior to bringing in the baby. Depending on your dog's personality, it may be less stressful to have the dog outside and baby inside and then walk the dog into the house with the baby in it.
5. Have at least 2 adults present, one with direct control and supervision of the dog.
6. Introduce calmly and slowly and only take it as far as your dog is relaxed. If your baby startles, your dog may startle as well and it is important for Mom and Dad to remain calm to show all is fine.
7. Don't force the introduction. Allow your dog to slightly sniff. If overly rambunctious or fearful, gently walk dog away without any scolding.
8. Make sure the dog is not aroused by the baby, as if prey. This can appear as: obsessive searching for the baby, staring, and chasing. **If this happens, it is important to keep them separated at all times and contact your veterinarian.**
9. If the introduction does go well, during the first couple of days, give your dog a long lasting food treat or something to play with when in the same room as your baby, as all good things come around the baby and this "goodie" will help with this. Ignore him when your baby is not around.
10. If you need to be alone with your baby, put your dog in another room behind a baby gate with a goodie so he can still see you but has a treat so he doesn't feel as if he is being punished.
11. Additionally, have an area where your dog can get away, such as another room.

If problems arise, immediately contact your veterinarian. This is a wonderful time for your family, but it is also a time for major adjustments for every member of your family, including your dog. So, if your dog shows signs of anxiety or aggression, contact your veterinarian. The most important thing is to maintain a safe household.

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