

Preparing your dog for a new baby

Taking time to prepare your family pets for your new baby's arrival and properly introducing them once your baby is born will help to make this transition peaceful for everyone involved. Dogs don't know how to interact with babies, and some may not even know what a baby is. A dog who gets along with small children will not necessarily recognize a baby as a smaller child, and could even view him as prey. To avoid injury to your child, assume that your dog will react unpredictably towards them and plan for this.

- **Start training now.** Enroll your dog in obedience training. Training class will teach you how to control your dog's behavior without causing them stress or giving them unpleasant associations with you or your baby.
 - **Once your dog can perform the basics (sit, down, stay, come, etc.) practice these commands while doing baby tasks.** Practice a down-stay while cradling a doll and walking it back and forth. Pat the doll's back as though burping it, sit back down, and so on. Reward your dog with treats for staying in the desired position. Practicing with a talking doll (some come with a crying track) can further simulate a real infant.
 - **If possible, begin to expose your dog to real babies, perhaps of friends or extended family.** Don't let your dog approach the baby: simply reward him for calm behavior in the baby's presence. If your dog shows discomfort (growling, barking, etc.) don't punish him: this won't teach him that aggression is bad, but that babies are bad news. Calmly remove him and repeat the exercise at a later time and at greater distance from the baby.
 - **Prepare your dog for baby sounds.** Recorded baby sounds (gurgles, babbling, crying) can be played at an extremely low volume while feeding your dog treats. With each session, increase the volume a little bit. The goal is for your dog to be relaxed even in the presence of loud crying. You won't want to deal with a barking dog and screaming baby during 2 a.m. diaper changes.
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Introducing your dog to the new baby

- If your new baby is born at the hospital, bring home blankets he/she has worn to familiarize your dog with the new scent.
- Schedule time and exercise for your dog to prevent behavior problems like barking, digging, chewing, and hyperactivity from developing.
- Plan to have one person handle the dog while another handles the baby. It's too risky and exhausting to ask one person to do both, and could result in injury to the baby.
- Use a Gentle Leader to control your excited dog. This will prevent your dog from jumping at the baby or simply moving too quickly toward her. Let your dog see the baby from 20 feet away, reward his calm behavior, then leave the room. Repeat from 15 feet away, 10 feet away, etc.
- Use caution when allowing your dog to approach the baby. Keep your dog on leash and watch for any signs of trouble: staring at the baby with a stiff body and closed mouth, high-pitched whining, or sudden lunges. If you are not sure what to look for, hire a trainer to come to your house and assist you with this stage.
- If you can't supervise your dog around your baby, confine your dog in a safe area. Ideally, this would be a crate in another room. If small children are visiting, lock the door to this safe room so no one lets the dog out without your knowledge.
- Pay special attention when the baby is crying, screaming, wiggling, and flailing her arms and legs, as this can provoke a predatory reaction in some dogs. Install a sturdy baby gate at the nursery door to keep your dog out or shut the nursery door and keep a baby monitor in the nursery.