

## Preparing Your Dog for a New Baby

With the arrival of a new baby, your dog will face an abundance of new sounds, sights and smells. This can be overwhelming, especially if they have no previous experience and/or limited interaction with children. With your family's new arrival, lifestyle and routines will change. This can be a challenging transition for your dog as they may notice a shift in your attention from them to baby. Reasonably, this can be an upsetting time for your dog, especially if they have been the "only child" for a while.



The best way to ease into this transition is to prepare your dog beforehand. In the months prior, you will want to focus on teaching your dog the skills they will need to safely interact with their new family member. This will aid in helping your dog adjust to the many new experiences and changes ahead.

### Making a plan

Any training that can be accomplished before the arrival of the baby will be beneficial. Teaching your dog basic obedience skills is highly important as these skills will aid in behaviour management when the baby arrives. Please see the section below, "Teaching Your Dog Important New Skills," for specific training guidelines. It is best to take time to ease into these new lifestyle changes:

**4 months prior to the arrival of the baby:** Gradually introduce your dog to the new sights, sounds and smells they will encounter and associate these new things with rewards. This will help your dog relate positively to life with the baby. You can introduce your dog to new sights and smells prior to the baby's arrival by:

- Letting the dog sniff and investigate the baby's toys, car seats, swings etc.
- Rubbing baby lotion or powder on you, so the dog gets used to the new smells that are yet to come
- Allowing them to listen to different baby sounds that you can easily search on YouTube

**1 - 2 months prior to the arrival of the baby:** Make any anticipatory changes to your dog's daily routine and put them into effect by doing some of these things:

### Teaching your dog important new skills

Having good verbal control of your dog can really help when it comes to juggling their needs and the baby's care. The following skills are particularly important:

#### Basic manners:

- Sit and down
- Stay, wait at doors and settle: These skills can help your dog learn to control their impulses, and they'll prove useful in many situations. For example, you can teach your dog to lie down and stay whenever you sit in your nursing chair.



## Preparing your dog for lifestyle changes

Dogs may become anxious when their environment has changed and bringing home a baby can do just that. However, you can help to reduce their stress by slowly introducing them to lifestyle changes in advance. For example:

- Change the dog's feeding routine - instead of feeding the dog at 8:00am, you can feed them randomly between the hours of 7:00am and 10:00am.
- Hire a dog walker to help with exercising the dog, as you may have less time to devote to walking them due to the needs of the new baby.
- Minimize changes in attention. You may shower your dog in all types of affection; however, this will change with the arrival of the new baby. You can start scheduling times throughout the day to cuddle your dog or play with their favourite toy and do this randomly in the weeks before the arrival of the new baby.
- Set new rules. Maybe the dog was allowed on the furniture or to sleep with you on the bed; you may not want this when you bring the new baby home. Well in advance of the baby's arrival, set up other areas in the house where the dog can have their comfortable space.
- A barking dog may become an issue, especially when a new baby is napping or sleeping. Teach your dog "quiet" using positive reinforcement before the baby comes home.

## Bringing baby home

Now that you've had some time to prepare your dog for the arrival of your baby, have a plan in mind for the actual welcoming of the baby:

- Upon arrival, your dog will greet you with enthusiasm. This is expected, but you will want to prevent the dog from jumping up on you when entering with the baby. To avoid this, first greet your dog individually.
- Once things have calmed down, select a quiet area for the initial interaction with you, your dog and the new baby. Ideally, someone (the handler) will bring the dog on-leash to the designated quiet area. While interacting, you will want to ensure that you stay calm and talk to your dog in a happy voice. If your dog's body language is calm and relaxed, you can ask the handler to let the dog approach closer. If the dog is interested in sniffing, and you feel comfortable, you can allow this by rewarding the dog for being relaxed and calm
- If your dog is showing signs of being uncomfortable, it is best to have them observe from a distance while tossing them treats.



## Supervision

Animals can be unpredictable in new scenarios. As much as we believe we know our dog's behaviours, babies make certain sounds and movements that could be perceived as frightening. This is why you should never leave your dog and baby unsupervised together.

- Do not allow your dog to have unsupervised access to the nursery. Add a baby gate or simply shut the door to prevent your dog from entering.
- To provide a positive association with the baby, you will want to offer treats to your dog when they are present as you are feeding or holding the baby.
- Since a lot of your life will be now consumed with the new baby, it is important to still make time to interact with your dog doing what they like, such as cuddling or playing with a favourite toy.
- It is important not to punish any negative behaviour your dog is showing to the baby, as this might increase their fear in the future.



## As baby gets older

When babies get older they start to move around and get very curious. We want to teach our young children to handle animals gently, but without knowing better they tend to grab fur, pull tails, etc. You can set your dog up for success before your child gets to that age by introducing them to types of touching that can be expected from a baby or toddler.

Before the baby learns to crawl, you should introduce your dog to crawling. Do this by crawling towards them and anytime they look at you, reward them. Babies and toddlers do not know that some dogs get upset when people go near their items such as food or toys. Even if your dog has not shown any type of resource guarding it's important to take some preventive measures a:

- While your dog is eating, walk by and toss high-value treats inside the bowl, such as hot dogs or chicken. You want the dog to associate good things happening while they eat.
- Feed the dog in a separate space and supervise them while they're eating.

It is important that when children grow older that they learn to recognize signs of fear, anxiety and stress that a dog may display.

## Dogs with pre-existing behaviour concerns

Some dogs that show aggression towards children may not have been properly socialized. These dogs may find children frightening, which can result in the dog acting aggressively.

- Some dogs that have pre-existing behaviour concerns toward children may need professional help from an expert in behaviour modification.
- It's always important to first seek medical advice from a veterinarian as there may be an underlying medical condition that may be causing this type of behaviour.
- For persistent problems or personal assistance, schedule a canine behaviour consultation through Toronto Humane Society.



## **Dog training classes**

Toronto Humane Society is proud to offer a variety of training classes for you and your pet. We are passionate about advocating for, and educating pet owners about humane, compassionate, and trust-building training practices. We pledge our commitment to providing you and your best friend with a constructive, supportive, and inspiring environment for strengthening the human-animal bond! Learn more here: <https://www.torontohumanesociety.com/pet-services/training-and-behaviour>

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Reference: <https://www.aspca.org/pet-care/dog-care/dogs-and-babies>

