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BRINGING A NEW BABY HOME

Preparing your pet and home for the new arrival

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Babies and pets

Congratulations on your new addition! We at Toronto Humane Society consider pets to be members of the family and hopefully you do too. Planning how to care for your fur babies during pregnancy and preparing them to meet your human baby once they've arrived doesn't have to be stressful. These are some helpful tips and things to consider that can keep you stay safer during pregnancy and provide a smoother transition for your pets when baby arrives.



General pet health

- Dogs and cats can carry intestinal parasites that are zoonotic, meaning they can be passed to humans. It is important to take your pet to the veterinarian on a regular basis to make sure they are healthy and fully dewormed.
- Toxoplasmosis is a feline protozoal infection that cats pick up via eating undercooked or raw meat, small mammals/birds, or contaminated soil. Toxoplasmosis in pregnant women can cause miscarriage, stillbirth and birth defects. Cats can transmit toxoplasmosis to their owners via feces.
 - According to the CDC, humans are most likely to become infected with toxoplasmosis via eating undercooked meat or gardening (as soil can be contaminated with feces). This is why it is advisable to always fully cook meat, wear gloves when gardening, thoroughly wash produce, and frequently wash your hands after gardening or handling food.
 - Indoor cats that are not fed raw or undercooked meat are at very low risk of toxoplasmosis infection. Amongst other reasons, this is why we recommend cats be kept indoors and fed a commercial dry or canned diet.
 - Precautions to take to prevent transmission of toxoplasmosis when caring for you cat include:
 - If possible, someone else in your household should clean the litter box while you are pregnant. If this isn't possible, wear gloves when cleaning the litter box and wash hands thoroughly afterwards.
 - The litter box should also be cleaned daily, it takes 1-5 days after feces is deposited in the litter box for toxoplasma cysts to become infectious.
 - Avoid handling stray cats or kittens.



Bringing Home Baby for Cat Lovers

Preparing your Cat for Baby's Arrival

Bringing home a new baby can be an exciting time! And growing up with a cat in the home can be great for your child's development, as it can lower their risk of developing asthma¹ and allergies², and can help teach your child to be empathetic³. But your cat may not be as pleased with the addition to the family. Thankfully, with a carefully organized transition you can set your cat and baby up for a beautiful friendship.

Before Baby

Cats are often stressed by changes to their environment. Having a baby will lead to many changes in their life, so try to get them used to as many of these new things as possible in advance. Your life is likely to be hectic after you bring your baby home, so you will be glad you laid the groundwork for this in advance!

- Set up your nursery gradually, starting at least 1 month before your due date. Allow your cat to explore these changes to the room as you go, so your cat can slowly adjust.
- Anticipate any sounds or smells that will be likely with your new baby, and gradually introduce them to these things in combination with something they like (e.g., treats or play).
 - The cries of an infant are very similar to the distress cries of a kitten, so these may be particularly upsetting to cats. Consider gradually introducing your cat to these sounds using YouTube videos.
 - Begin wearing baby powder and baby lotion on your hands weeks before your due date, so they associate the smell with you (someone they know and love!).
- If you can predict any changes to your cat's regular routine (reductions in interaction, changes to feeding times, or a new person acting as the primary caregiver), make these changes early.
- Ensure your home is properly enriched. Provide everything your cat needs to help them cope with stress and to keep from getting bored. Equip your home with opportunities for your cat to hide, perch, scratch, and play. See THS's Behaviour Info Sheet on "Enriching Your Home" for more information!
- Consider using a Feliway™ diffuser in or near your nursery. Feliway™ is a synthetic feline facial pheromone thought to have a calming effect on cats. There is some debate as to whether or not it works⁴, but some owners claim that it has had a profound impact on reducing their cat's fear.

After Baby is Born

Your preparation has given you a head start on helping your cat accept your new family member, but there are still a few key actions you should take after the baby is born.

- While you are in the hospital, ask a friend or family member to take a blanket or item of clothing that your new baby has worn to your home and put it near your cat's food. This will allow your cat to investigate the smells on their own, and hopefully help them to develop a positive association with the scent.
- Once you arrive home with your baby:
 - Greet your cat without your baby first, in order to re-establish your bond with them.
 - Once things have settled down from the initial bustle of arriving home, hold your baby and allow your cat to investigate. Reward calm behaviours around your baby by providing treats. Do not force the interaction – if your cat begins to show signs of fear (such as crouching or large pupils) allow them to observe from a distance they deem as safe and throw them treats. If your cat continues to approach but shows concerning behaviours (such as flattened ears or growling) end the interaction by calmly leaving the room.



- Always supervise any interactions between your baby and cat.
 - Do not allow your cat into the nursery when you are not around. Despite rumours that cats may inadvertently suffocate babies while they are sleeping, there are no confirmed cases of this happening. However, it is entirely possible that your cat may scratch the baby (even accidentally) or urinate in the crib.
- A great opportunity to encourage your cat to form positive associations with your baby's presence is by giving them treats when you are feeding or holding your baby.
- Although most of your waking hours will be consumed by thoughts of your baby, it is important that you still make time to interact with your cat daily by playing, petting or cuddling – whatever your cat likes best!
- It is very important that you do not punish any negative behaviours your cat shows towards your baby. This may strengthen any feelings of fear your cat has towards your baby and actually increase the intensity of these reactions in the future.

As Baby Gets Older

Hopefully by now your cat has accepted your new family member. But as your baby develops into a toddler, new concerns will arise.

- Teach your baby to pet your cat gently. As they grow, make sure they learn to recognise signs of fear, anxiety, and stress exhibited by your cat, and to respond appropriately.
- Provide comfortable hiding spots out of your toddler's reach where your cat can relax undisturbed.
- Keep cat food bowls & litterboxes somewhere your toddler can't access.

Cats with Pre-existing Behaviour Concerns

If your cat exhibits concerning unwanted behaviours (such as 'unpredictable' aggression, out-of-box elimination, or chronic fear) before you bring home your new baby, the transition may be more difficult. Begin to address unwanted behaviours as early as possible before your baby arrives.

- Contact your veterinarian. Many unwanted behaviour problems have underlying medical causes. It is possible that after an exam and a few tests, there may be a treatment that can resolve these behaviours quickly – and improve your cat's quality of life!
 - Your veterinarian may recommend behaviour medications to help manage event-based stress or chronic anxiety.
 - Consider also asking your vet to apply Soft Paws (temporary and humane caps that go over your cat's claws) if you have legitimate concerns about swatting.
- Barring a medical cause, there are many management and behaviour modification strategies that can help reduce or eliminate unwanted behaviours. There are many useful resources available online, but be sure visit reputable sources such as IAABC.org, ASPCA.org, or DrSophiaYin.com. For persistent problems or personal assistance, schedule a Feline Behaviour Consultation through the Toronto Humane Society!
- Despite your best efforts, some cats may not be compatible with a baby. In these cases, rehoming may be the best option for your family's safety and your cat's wellbeing. If possible, find a friend or family member who is willing to give your cat a new home. Cats with ongoing behaviour concerns typically find shelters more stressful than the average cat. This means that these cats are more difficult to find homes for – both because of their history of unwanted behaviours, and because these behaviours are often exaggerated by the stress they are experiencing in shelter.



Preparing Your Dog for Baby's Arrival

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 smell prior to the baby's arrival by:

- Letting the dog sniff and investigate the baby's toys, car seats, swings etc.
- Rub baby lotion or powder on you, so the dog gets used to the new smells that are yet to come
- Allow 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 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 basic manners are particularly important.

- 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, there are ways to help reduce the stress that may come when their lifestyle is changed by slowly introducing them to the changes in advance. For example:

- Changing dogs feeding routine - instead of feeding the dog at 8:00am, you can feed them randomly between the hours of 7:00am and 10:00am.
- Another asset would be hiring a dog walker to help with exercising the dog, as their amount of exercise may be less due to the needs of the new baby
- Minimizing changes in attention. You may shower your dog in all types of affection, however, this will change with the arrival of the new baby. Start scheduling times through-out the day to cuddle or play with their favourite toy, do this randomly in the up-coming weeks before the arrival of the new baby
- At this time also you may want to set new rules, maybe the dog was allowed on the furniture or sleeping with you on the bed. You may not want this when you bring the new baby home. Setting up areas well in advance within the house where the dog can have their comfortable space is ideal.
- Barking dogs may become an issue, especially when a new baby is napping or sleeping. Teaching your dog "quiet" using positive reinforcement should be started well before the baby comes'

Bringing Baby Home

Now that you had some time to prepare your dog for the arrival of your baby there are some other things that will be beneficial to address for the actual welcoming of the baby home:

- 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 you will want to 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. While interacting, you will want to ensure that you are remaining 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 your 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 time will be now consumed with the new baby it is important to still provide sufficient enough time to interact with your dog in 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 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 even knowing any 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. At this age your baby may be crawling and right before this happens 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 follow some preventable measures such as:

- While your dog is eating, walk by and toss high valued treats inside the bowl such as hot dogs or chicken. You want the dog to associate good things happening while they eat.
- You will want to supervise while the dog is eating and make sure you have a separate space to do so

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.

For additional information or tips on managing this behaviour in your home, please contact the Training Department at training@torontohumanesociety.com or (416) 392-2273 ext.2145.

Dog Training Classes

The 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! <https://www.torontohumanesociety.com/what-we-do/dog-training-classes>

Dog Walking

Toronto Humane Society's Dog Walking Team is a group of highly trained and passionate animal lovers strongly invested in welfare and professionalism. Collectively, we bring years of experience in animal care to this service, drawing from varied backgrounds in shelter care, commercial dog walking, commercial and in shelter dog training and behavior modification and business development. <https://www.torontohumanesociety.com/what-we-do/dog-walking>



Other Pets

Birds

- If your bird is healthy the risk of you picking up an illness from them is very low.
- We recommend going to a veterinarian to have a full check up, bloodwork, and fecal testing. Birds can carry Chlamydia (a bacterial infection) and some protozoal organisms that can be transmissible to humans. A clean bill of health from a veterinarian will give you peace of mind that the health risk to you is very low.
- To be as safe as possible, have someone else clean your bird's cage if possible. If this is not possible, always wash your hands thoroughly after cleaning your bird's cage or handling your bird.

Mice, Rats, Hamsters, Guinea Pigs

- Lymphocytic choriomeningitis virus (LCMV) is a disease transmissible to humans that is carried by rodents. The primary host is the wild common house mouse. It is estimated 5% of the wild mouse population are asymptomatic carriers that can transmit the virus.
- Infection of pet rodents is uncommon but can occur if pets are exposed to wild mice or were raised in an environment such as a pet shop where they were exposed to wild mice.
- Infection in humans can cause an initial flu like illness that can later progress to meningitis and/or encephalitis. Pregnant women that become infected may pass the infection to their fetus causing miscarriage or birth defects.
- Infection occurs after exposure to fresh feces, urine, saliva, or nesting materials from infected rodents.
- Simple precautions can be taken to help prevent your risk of exposure to the virus. If possible, while pregnant have another person clean the cage. If this is not possible, wear gloves when cleaning the cage and wash hands thoroughly after cleaning and handling your pet.

Reptiles and Amphibians

- Reptiles and amphibians can carry the bacteria Salmonella in their feces. Salmonella is transmissible to humans and causes signs such as diarrhea, vomiting, stomach cramps, fever and chills. Signs can range from mild to severe/life threatening.
- Children under 5 and pregnant women are at greater risk of getting sick from Salmonella. The Ontario Ministry of health does not recommend keeping reptiles and amphibians in homes with pregnant women or children under 5.
- Precautions to take if these types of pets are kept in the home include having someone else clean the cage and handle the pets while you are pregnant, thorough hand washing after handling pets and cleaning cages, and careful sanitation and disposal of contaminated items (water, bedding, etc) away from areas where food is prepared.



References

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