

New Baby

Are you expecting a new baby? Congratulations! Introducing a baby into your home is a big change for everyone, including your dog. Here are some guidelines for a safe, smooth introduction, and the beginning of a wonderful friendship.

Before Baby

Pregnancy Months 1-3

Take an obedience class with your dog to refresh her behavior and manners, as well as teach her new, useful behaviors. If your dog has an existing behavior problem, it's important to address it now with behavior modification and management.

This is also the time to take your dog to the vet for a complete medical checkup. Spay/neuter your dog if you haven't done so already.

Pregnancy Months 3-5

Prepare a comfortable confinement area or crate for your dog inside your home. This will be a safe place for her to go when she gets stressed or confused by all the activities.

Start playing baby sounds (you can find videos online) and practice holding a baby-sized doll in your arms. Walk your dog with baby equipment, such as a carrier or stroller. Remember to reward her with yummy treats often so that you start to build a positive link to all these changes.

Pregnancy Months 5-7

Introduce a change in schedule to your dog's daily routine, randomly and slowly. Practice varied time in his confinement area with a KONG or another puzzle toy. This will make quiet-time training fun. If the expectant mother is the primary dog walker or caretaker, it's time to introduce a new walker or caretaker. This can be a spouse, partner, friend, or professional dog walker.

Remember to prepare for car safety too. Your dog will need to be confined to a specific area of the car by a barrier, tether, or crate. This ensures a safe ride for both baby and dog.

Pregnancy Months 7-9

Practice Sit, Stay, and Leave It around the baby's furniture and baby equipment. Introduce a baby gate if the dog won't be allowed into baby's room.

Also practice baby-feeding time. Your dog should be on her bed or in her confinement area/crate. While nursing, you will need to be calm and focused on the baby, so remember to give the dog something to do during this quiet time.

Make preparations for your dog to be cared for while you are at the hospital. Arrange for a person who can pick up the dog from your home or stay in the home with your dog. Make sure this person has a set of your house keys in case you're already at the hospital but the dog is at home.

After Baby

Months 1-3

While Mom is in the hospital, a spouse, partner, or friend can bring home some newborn items (such as a blanket or clothing) to introduce to the dog. Your dog may spend a day or two with a friend or sitter so you can settle in with baby. You can also enlist extra help when you arrive home from the hospital. You can say hello to your dog and spend some time with him while someone is caring for baby.

Newborn care can be overwhelming for new parents. Help around the house, with childcare or dog care can be a relief and help reduce stress. Remember to keep soiled diapers in a tightly closed container so your dog can't get to them.

Your dog still needs to get plenty of exercise. If possible, increase his exercise activity for the next several weeks. A tired dog is calmer and more relaxed. Be sure to enlist the help you need to keep your dog's routine as constant as possible.

Make all introductions to your newborn short and positive, using rewards liberally. You want to build a positive association with the newborn and all the exciting changes in your family.

Months 4-7

Your newborn is now a baby and is changing daily. The baby will play in a playpen, roll around on the ground with toys, and start to move around much more. Your baby will squeal, laugh, and cry in frustration. Manage and **always** supervise! Again, rewards for your dog during this time are very important.

This is a great time for family and dog outings, either for walks or rides in the car. It is important to include the baby in activities that the dog will find enjoyable such as fun family outings and walks.

Months 7-12

Babies and toddlers are often the most difficult to manage around dogs. They are crawling, pulling themselves up on objects, and beginning to walk. They grab, pull, and bite.

Babies should never be allowed to climb on, crawl on, or startle your dog. Babies and toddlers don't have complete control of motor skills, so they may inadvertently throw or hit a dog with a hard toy. Toddlers are not expert walkers and may trip and fall on or near the dog, another reason for strict supervision.

Supervise all interactions between your baby and your dog. Keep the interactions enjoyable for both and use a baby gate or confinement to separate baby and dog the rest of the time.

You should now begin to show your baby how to gently pet your dog, and praise both for a successful interaction. Remember that babies and toddlers are too young to understand boundaries and must be kept away from your dog's safe area, crate, and feeding bowls.

The most important thing you can do to safeguard your baby and your dog is to always supervise. Never leave your baby alone with your dog, even when the baby is in a crib, bassinet, high chair, playpen, rocker/bouncer, swing, doorway jumper, bathtub, baby carrier, car seat, or stroller.

Don't ask baby sitters to be responsible for both baby and dog. When you leave your baby with a sitter, keep your dog in a secure confinement area.

Information adapted with permission from San Francisco SPCA.