



A New Baby

Expecting a baby? Congratulations! This is an exciting time and there's so much to do before the big day. How will your dog react to the presence of a newborn? Each dog is different. Luckily, there are some easy, common sense things you can do to help assure that dog and baby get along harmoniously right from the start.

A solid foundation

It is important to begin teaching your dog appropriate behavior around babies even before you bring your newborn home. Good overall obedience is a must. Your dog should know the basics: sit, stay and come when called. It is also helpful if your dog understands how to walk without pulling on his leash and does not jump up when greeting people. If your dog is not consistent with the basics, consider enrolling in a good obedience class that features positive training methods.

Start before baby comes home

Once you have got the basics down, there are some fun exercises you can do with your dog that will help you both be more comfortable with the new arrival.

Baby Practice - wrap a baby doll in a receiving-type blanket. Carry the doll as you would a real baby, coo to it and fuss over it. Have dog treats hidden in your pocket. REWARD your dog for not jumping and for calm behavior when you are paying attention to the "baby." You may need to remind your dog to sit instead of jumping on you.

Attention Sharing - make sure your dog is happy to have the baby around. Sit with the doll and pretend to feed it. REWARD your dog with dog treats or a pat on the head as long as he investigates the baby appropriately (gently, with no growling or nipping) and is behaving calmly. You can also keep a jar of treats or your dog's favorite toy by the baby's changing table (you'll spend a lot of time there...). Pretend to change the doll's diaper. REWARD the dog with a treat or his favorite toy for sitting calmly while you change the diaper.

Baby Monitor - give your dog a job. Make a recording of babies crying. Play the tape while practicing obedience with your dog and playing with him, reward him for being good while the baby is crying. Once the dog is comfortable with the new sound, you can play the recording and practice calling your dog. REWARD him for coming to you. If you practice this enough, when the real baby begins to cry, your dog will anticipate a recall and find you for his treat. It is also important that you behave calmly when responding to your baby's cry. Dogs can sense your tension.

Gotcha - practice ONLY if your dog has not previously exhibited any type of aggression (growling, snapping, biting). Have your dog's favorite food treat ready. Give your dog's ear a gentle tug. Immediately give him a treat. Next, pull on some fur, give a food treat. Tug the dog's collar, yank on a leg, pull his tail - always immediately give a food treat. Never pull so hard that you hurt your dog, but as you practice, make the tugs fairly firm.

Then, hug your dog and immediately give the food treat. The goal is to make your dog LOVE to be tugged on and hugged. This will come in very handy when your child is old enough to grab ears and tails. The dog should react to a tug by happily waiting for his treat, instead of growling, or even worse, biting your infant.

When to call a Behavior Consultant

Some behaviors may be cause for concern. If your dog has exhibited any of the following, please contact a qualified Behavior Consultant before you bring your newborn home:

Guarding - does your dog growl, snap, or freeze (hold head very still over object) when you get close to him and he is...

...eating?

...chewing on a toy/rawhide?

...playing with a stolen object?

Aggression - has your dog ever bitten, snapped, or growled at anyone?

Predation - has your dog ever chased and killed a small animal?

A final thought

In most instances, dogs and babies get along just fine. Practicing these exercises will not only help to increase your chances for success but can also help strengthen your relationship with your dog. Always keep in mind, however, that no matter how well your dog and your new baby get along, accidents can happen: **never leave children unsupervised with your dog. Kids and babies should never be allowed to tug on or lay on dogs. Dogs can be pretty tolerant, but it doesn't mean they like it. It could only be a matter of time when they become fed up and an incident occurs.**

For more information about pet behavior and training, please **visit our website at michiganhumane.org.**