

Dog: Will Baby Make Four?



Do you have a bundle of joy on the way? Congratulations! Introducing a newborn baby into your home is a big change for the entire family, including the family dog. However, a baby on the way shouldn't mean an eviction notice for your dog. With preparation and a few good management strategies, babies and pets can be a successful combination.

Here are some guidelines for a safe, smooth introduction, and the beginning of a wonderful friendship.

Before Baby: Pregnancy Months 1–3

Enroll in a reward-based dog training class that teaches humane techniques. This will refresh your dog's obedience behaviors and manners, and teach him new, useful behaviors. We offer a specialized training class for expecting and new parents, as well as a wide range of beginner to advanced classes.

If your dog has an existing behavior problem, you need to address this with behavior modification and management. We have a referral list of trainers available for private in-home consultations. This is also the time to visit your vet for a complete medical checkup and to make sure your dog is current on vaccinations, deworming, and otherwise healthy. If you haven't already done so, spay or neuter your pet.

Before Baby: Pregnancy Months 3–5

Prepare a comfortable confinement area or crate for your dog inside your home. Your dog may be stressed or confused by all the day- and night-time activities and he may be more relaxed in a quiet resting area. This is also a good time to introduce baby gates as threshold barriers.

Introduce baby sounds (CDs are available online) and practice holding a baby-sized doll in your arms. You need to get used to doing many things with only one arm, as the baby will be in the other, so it's good to practice now.

Walk the dog with baby equipment, such as a baby carrier (front-of-chest carrier) and/or stroller. Remember to reward with tasty treats often during this preparation time. You want to build a positive association with all these changes.

Before Baby: 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 stimulating 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. We have a referral list of dog walking services and pet sitters.

Don't overlook car safety. Your dog will need to be confined to a specific area of the car by a barrier or crate. This ensures a safe ride for both baby and dog.

Before Baby: Pregnancy Months 7–9

Introduce the baby room and baby furniture around the house so your dog can get used to his changing home environment. Use a baby gate if your dog won't be allowed into baby's room. Practice Sit, Stay, and Leave It around the baby's furniture and baby equipment.

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Simulate baby-feeding time, either in your bed or nursing chair. During this time, your dog should be on his bed, in his confinement area, or crate. While nursing, you will need to be calm and focused on the baby, so remember to give the dog a KONG or other puzzle toy 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.

Your dog's exercise routine should stay consistent. If possible, increase his exercise activity for the next several weeks. A well-exercised 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.

After Baby: 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 supervise diligently! Again, rewards for your dog during this time are very important.

This is a good 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.

After Baby: 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 become explorers, intrigued by their tactile, oral, and visual senses. They grab, pull, bite, and have raw determination.

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.

Dog: Will Baby Make Four? *(continued)*

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

You should now begin to model appropriate behavior with dogs. Show your baby how to gently pet your dog, and praise both for a successful interaction. You will be teaching this for many years to come. 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.

A Final Word

The success of child-dog relationships depends on constant parent/adult supervision, management, and the teaching and modeling of appropriate behavior for interactions. Make these principles part of your family life and everyone wins.