

Bringing Home Baby – to Meet Fido

BEFORE BABY COMES HOME

BASIC TRAINING

The first step is to provide your dog with the basics; come, sit, stay, don't touch, off, wait, and don't jump on people. Also, having your dog walking at heel when you're pushing a stroller can be invaluable. If your dog has had some obedience training take the time now to practice and reinforce those commands. If your dog has never been trained, it's definitely time to start! Curbing any mouthing or biting behavior is critical. Your dog's "love-bite" can cause a serious injury to an infant or toddler!

PREPARATION

Begin to reduce the amount of attention you give your dog. It will be difficult for your dog to accept the baby when he associates it with not getting as much attention as he did before the baby arrived. You won't have the time to shower him/her with loads of attention once the baby arrives.

Before the baby is born, start preparing the dog for toddler play. Pull its ears and tail a little, stand over the dog, straddling him. Behave in the way small children often do with dogs. You'll want to see how the dog responds, so that you can correct the behavior, if necessary, before your child does those things.

Make lots of noise around the dog. Act like a child by spontaneously running through the house screaming and clapping or waving your arms. You may feel silly doing it, but your dog will learn to take it in stride and not be freaked out when the baby screams or the toddler runs through the house.

FAKE BABY

After the dog knows the basics, the next step is to get a doll, sprinkle it with baby powder, wrap it in a baby blanket, cradle it, rock it, talk to it, sing to it, and walk around the house with it. While you do this, praise your dog for not jumping up on you, by saying, "Good dog." Show the doll to your dog and let him smell it. Give praise and small food treats at the same time.

Next, get a recording of a crying baby and play it softly at first. Praise your dog, while listening, and reinforce his quiet behavior with a petting and verbal rewards. Increase the volume each day and continue to praise him.

REAL BABY

If you have a friend or relative with a young baby, invite them to your house. Reinforce good behavior with praise while the baby is visiting.

BRINGING BABY HOME

ARRIVING HOME

On the day of arrival, it would be best for you let someone else carry the baby so that you can enter the home first and greet the dog with baby. After you have greeted the dog it is a good idea to put your dog's leash on for the first few encounters; that way you will have the physical control needed to prevent any inappropriate behavior.

It is important to introduce the dog to the baby. This makes it clear to the dog that the baby is a new member of the "pack". Then have the baby brought in. If you can trust your dog's behavior around babies at this time, let him see, smell, and touch the baby. If you don't trust the dog, don't let the dog near the baby without a muzzle! Be sure you know your dog is comfortable in all situations before allowing even supervised access.

LIFE WITH BABY

Even the most well-trained dog may regress around a new baby. Some dogs will break housesoiling rules for a short time after baby's arrival. They think that if this new littermate can do it anywhere, so can they. To discourage this from happening, do not leave dirty diapers lying around.

Act happy and relaxed while your dog is in the room with the new baby. Pay attention to the dog when the baby is in the room and ignore the dog as much as possible when the baby was not in the room. In other words, don't use the baby's nap time as the time to pay attention to the dog. That way, the dog won't perceive the baby as competition for your attention.

Your dog will want to investigate the new baby. Allow the dog to sniff the baby, while the baby is safely in your arms, but be very clear about the boundaries - no licking, no sniffing the baby's head and face, etc. It's better to let the dog get to know the baby while you're there - because if you don't, the dog will do it when you aren't there to supervise!

You may not have the same feeling of devotion and love toward your dog after your baby arrives. Be prepared for this surprising change of attitude. Your dog is no longer your baby. The important thing to remember is to try and give him as much attention, playtime, and exercise as before.

Food bowl safety is another important area. To get the dog used to having others near its bowl, while your dog is eating, put your hand into the bowl and drop in a really special treat or two. Do this frequently. When the dog is comfortable with that, occasionally reach into the bowl without adding a treat and progress to taking the bowl away for a few seconds and then returning it or removing a piece of food (if you feed dry dog food).