

Why prepare your dog for your baby?

From your dog's point of view, a baby is the strangest creature that ever was. It screams and thrashes, coos and gurgles. It smells funny. It also consumes the energy of previously devoted pet owners. Weeks go by and suddenly your once-well-behaved dog is chewing the furniture. There you are, already overwhelmed by diapers, feeding, and sleep deprivation. Do you put the dog in the yard all day? Ask family to take him over, even if it breaks your heart?

The key is preparation. You need to decide well ahead of time how your dog's routines will change—one of the biggest concerns will be who is going to give him his exercise.

Babies and dogs can and do live in harmony, but not by chance.

Before baby.

8 weeks before due date:

- Practice having your dog sit for people coming in the door while you hold a doll.
- Begin walking your dog with the stroller.
- Brush up on your dog's obedience skills.

6 weeks before due date:

- Call dog sitters and arrange for care while you are at the hospital.
- Add sitters' names to your Hospital Contact list.
- Put up X-pens and baby gates in appropriate areas.
- Begin confinement practice: Put your dog in the confinement area for 10–15 minutes with a stuffed Kong or chew bone.

5 weeks before due date:

- Create dog care instructions for your sitter and include your vet's name and number.
- Call dog walkers and schedule interviews.
- Give your dog a stuffed Kong on his mat while you read a book in the nursing chair.

4 weeks before due date:

- Choose a dog walker and add him or her to your Hospital Contact list.
- Finalize dog walking schedule.
- Put a doll in the baby swing and have your dog practice doing a stay on his mat.

3 weeks before due date:

- Hide your house keys in a safe location for your dog sitter or be sure they have an extra set.
- Create dog care instructions for your dog walker and include where your dog should be left if you are not at home when your dog is returned.
- Arrange for your dog walker to receive your house keys and schedule a trial run.

2 weeks before due date:

- At this point, you may want your dog to begin his schedule with the dog walker.

- Schedules are great for babies and dogs. Try to anticipate and practice your new daily routine and to get your dog accustomed to a little less of your attention.

1 week before due date:

- Take a deep breath and relax

Questions to answer before baby:

Nursery: Will your dog be allowed in the nursery?

No? Buy a baby gate and block your dog's access to the room now.

Yes? Choose a safe spot for your dog to hang out and place a doggie mat or bed there.

Living room: Will your dog be allowed on the furniture once baby arrives?

If no, and he currently is, make the change now.

If yes, where will your dog be while you are on the couch with the baby?

Also consider where baby's toys will be stored, and where your dog's toys will be stored.

Bedroom: Will your dog be sleeping in your bedroom?

No? If he currently does, make the change now.

Yes? Will he be on a dog bed? In a crate? Then make the change now.

Kitchen: Will your dog be allowed in the kitchen during mealtimes?

No? Where will he be? Is a baby gate needed?

Yes? Where will he be and what will he be doing?

After baby.

- The number one golden rule: Never leave your baby alone with your dog. Ever. Babies are out of control. Their feet kick, arms flap, fingers grasp, bodies roll. Such actions may frighten or harm your dog—and no matter how wonderful your dog is around your baby, it is not safe to leave them alone together.
- Let your dog investigate the baby, making sure baby is well swaddled and protected.
- That dogs feel human-style jealousy is a myth, but your dog will certainly notice if he is getting much less love and attention, and he might form negative associations with baby if every time he comes close, someone yells, "No, down, get away!" Be sure to give your baby and your dog attention at the same time: Feed your dog before feeding the baby in the same room or just outside. Give your dog eye contact and verbal praise while carrying the baby. Whenever you buy a new baby toy, buy a rawhide as well. Insist that visitors fuss over your dog when fussing over the baby.

Toddlers and tweens.

To dogs, toddlers are very different from babies. They crawl, throw food, and then suddenly, they walk. During each of the different development stages your child will go through, you need to reinforce the positive associations you have established between dog and child.

The golden rule counts more than ever: Never leave your small child and your dog alone. Toddlers are too young to understand how to 'pet nice', no matter how patiently you explain and show them. Here, you are

protecting both your child and your dog. The wagging tail of a friendly dog can knock over a toddler, and the sharp nails on little fingers can hurt dog noses and ears.

As soon as your child is old enough to learn by your example, teach him or her how to treat your dog. Dogs are frightened by shouts in the face, sudden movements, and grabs at tail, ears, or nose, and should always be treated with respect and kindness. These skills take time to perfect. Remember that children don't realize that animals feel pain or that living pets differ from the cuddly and furry stuffed animals they get to squeeze and throw around. Teach your child never to squeeze or grab your dog, and never to approach any dog that is eating or sleeping.