

DOG 25

Your dog and your baby



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As soon as you know there is a new baby on the way, you and your family will begin to prepare yourselves for the changes ahead. Your family pet will also need to be prepared for the new arrival, as there will be alterations to the home environment and routine once your baby comes into the house.

Start your preparations early

With a little forward planning, you can get your pet used to the changes well in advance, so that they should hardly notice any difference when your baby actually arrives. You should start to make preparations four months before the birth – don't leave it until your baby has arrived. The whole family can enjoy the benefits that having a pet can bring by following the advice in this leaflet.

Before your baby is born

Handling

Ideally, your dog will already be relaxed and happy about being touched all over their body. However, if your dog gets overly excited when stroked, then you may need to slowly work on this with some gentle handling exercises when they are calm and quiet. If your dog is sensitive about certain areas being touched, then you will have to be mindful of this when your baby becomes more mobile, as a baby's enthusiasm for stroking can easily overwhelm a shy dog.

Sounds

To help prepare your dog for the sounds that babies make, play recordings of a baby crying, gurgling and screaming for short periods during the day. Initially the sound should be barely audible, increasing the volume gradually as your dog grows accustomed to the noises. It's important that your dog feels calm and relaxed with the sounds before

you increase the volume, so remember to take this slowly.

New smells and objects

Get the dog used to baby powder, soaps, shampoos and baby milk by using them at home in the weeks leading up to your baby's arrival. Playpens, cots, pushchairs, highchairs and changing mats should be in place before the baby arrives too.

Exercise

When you walk your dog, think about how much exercise they get, if they pull on the lead, come back when called or whether they're problematic around other dogs. Once your baby arrives you will have to manage any problems while wheeling a pram or pushchair. Also, new mothers may be in some physical discomfort after having a baby, so you will need to make sure that the dog can be physically controlled. If your dog pulls on the lead, you could buy a harness or headcollar (eg a "Gentle Leader") which helps to stop



dogs pulling. It is a good idea to practice walking your dog next to a pushchair before your baby arrives as this will benefit you both – your dog may be a little nervous of it at first, so make sure you use lots of treats to help build their confidence. Don't tie the lead to the pushchair because this could be really dangerous if your dog lunges unexpectedly.

See how often your friends or relatives might be willing to walk your dog while you're still pregnant. This will give you an indication of the amount of exercise they will get if you can't take them out yourself. If you can, walking with your dog and baby is a fantastic way to get you both into a good exercise routine again, and it will provide lots of mental stimulation for everyone. If you think they'll receive shorter or fewer walks once the baby arrives then you need to change the routine a few weeks in advance. If they get fewer walks they will need to use up their energy some other way, otherwise they'll get bored. Bored dogs are not happy, and they may become stressed and destructive. Don't try to make up for fewer walks by giving your dog more food treats. You will only make them overweight and unhealthy. Try to compensate for fewer walks by playing more games with them and consider paying a responsible dog walker to take them out for you.

Training

A well trained dog is a pleasure to live with and when your baby arrives you will



really appreciate it if your dog already knows the basics, such as coming back when called and how to walk on a loose lead. If you feel your dog would benefit from refreshing these important skills, then now is the time to put the effort in as when your baby arrives you are likely to be very busy. Blue Cross only recommends kind reward-based methods of training.

Food

Many accidents occur when babies or toddlers approach a dog's food bowl, or when the baby tries to take a dog's bone or chew. Ensure that your dog is able to eat their dinner and other food items in peace, without fear of being disturbed or pestered. If your dog has a tendency to snatch treats, then now is the time to teach them how to take them gently from your hand.

Attention

Your new baby will take up a lot of your time. You will have visitors to see the baby, including family, friends and health visitors and it's unlikely you will be able to give

your dog the same amount of attention once the baby arrives. Some dogs may find this change particularly difficult, especially if they spend a great deal of time with their owners, so it's a good idea to help prepare them for a new routine as early as possible.

If you intend to keep your dog in a separate area when certain people visit, help your dog get used to this before your baby arrives, by placing them behind a stair gate occupied with a tasty chew a few times a day for several minutes at a time. Gradually and slowly increase the time they spend there, so it becomes an activity that they regularly expect. By the time your baby arrives, you'll find that they are already used to this routine and won't be distressed or confused when they have to be separated from you for short periods of time. Remember that some dogs may enjoy the extra attention they get from visitors, whereas others may become overwhelmed if it is something they are not used to. If your dog is on the nervous side, make sure that they are given a quiet place to retreat to if necessary.

Toys

Dog toys and baby toys are often made of similar materials and some toys even make the same kind of noise, like a squeak. So it's not surprising that some dogs become confused about which toys they can play with!

If you play with your dog inside the house, you may want to start putting their toys away after play, or even reserving play time for the garden or on walks. This will make it easier for your dog to understand that play occurs when you produce their toys, rather than when they pick up a toy in the house. It also prevents the baby from picking up the dog's toys and putting them in their mouth. When the baby arrives, it will then be easier for you to teach your dog to ignore the baby's toys as they have already learnt that play only happens when you produce their toys. If your dog does pick up the baby's toys, avoid becoming angry, as this will only frighten them. It is far better to have taught your dog to "leave" toys prior to the baby's arrival using positive reward methods, to avoid any confusion.

A quiet place to go

Pets should always have a quiet, safe place to go to whenever they need to rest. This will be especially important to them once the baby arrives and eventually begins to toddle about. Dogs will need to be given their own space. Teach your dog to go to a place that makes the dog feel safe and happy (eg a bed in the corner of a room). An indoor kennel (also known as a cage or dog crate) could also be considered for those times when they need peace. When your dog retreats to their safe place, try to ensure that your baby doesn't toddle up to them unexpectedly.

Resting and sleeping places

You should decide if you intend to change where your dog currently rests and sleeps once the baby has arrived. For example, if they lie on your sofa every evening and sleep next to you in bed, are you happy for this to continue? If not, make all changes well in advance so they don't associate the change with the arrival of the baby. If you do decide to change resting areas, make sure that you provide your dog with a really comfortable alternative. It would be too much to expect your dog to sleep in the kitchen overnight if they are used to sleeping in your bed without any preparation, so try to do it in gradual steps to help them adapt to the change.

Health matters

Make sure that your dog is in good physical health. They should also be free from fleas and worms. Any suspicions about illness or developing ailments should be checked out by a qualified veterinary surgeon. Any pain or irritation that the dog experiences will lower their threshold for aggression (ie if they are in pain, they will be less tolerant about being handled and more likely to growl, snap or bite).

How will your pet react?

If your pet has already experienced the arrival of a new baby, and has coped well, you should not have too many problems. However, if this is the first time

they will be living with a new baby, then ask yourself the following questions:

- What sort of relationship will you have with your pet when the baby arrives?
- Once the baby comes, will you want to exclude your pet from certain areas of the house?
- Does your pet have any behavioural problems? If so, they may get worse once a baby has arrived. You should contact your vet for a referral to a pet behaviour counsellor if you need help.

If you are happy with your pet's behaviour, then you can proceed with the general advice given in this leaflet.

After your baby is born

First introductions

When you first come home from hospital with your new baby, your dog will probably be very excited. The best way to carry out this first introduction is when the dog is tired after a long walk and play session. At first, say hello to your dog without the baby in case they get excited and jump up at you. Later, the baby should be introduced in a quiet room where the dog has few associations – not in a place where they usually sleep or eat.

Praise your dog

Associate your baby's presence with positive, enjoyable experiences for your pet. When they are behaving well around the baby, give lots of gentle

praise and tasty tidbits. The first interaction should be under control with the baby being held in a parent's arms and the dog allowed to sniff the child. The dog will appear interested for a few seconds and will then lose interest. When they back away you should praise them and give them a treat.

Carry on with the normal daily duties and routine and the dog should accept the new arrival readily. Pets will be very patient while you adapt to life with a new baby, so don't forget to include them.

Hygiene

People who do not have pets of their own may try and encourage you to rehome your pet due to hygiene. It's essential that your dog is treated for worms and fleas regularly, using products from your vet. Don't leave dirty nappies on the floor, as they can cause the dog to wet or mess on that spot. Nappies can also be appetising for certain dogs, so it is essential that any nappy bin has a sealed lid and is emptied regularly. Use antibacterial soap to clean your hands after feeding, grooming, cleaning or playing with your dog.

Supervision

Do not put your baby on the floor with the dog and never leave your dog unsupervised with a baby, not even for a second. This includes all dogs, even those with an excellent temperament. The use of a screen door or stair gate for your baby's nursery allows you to keep the door shut but still see and hear them.



Toddlers

Your baby will soon start crawling and toddling and it's important for you to remain vigilant once they start to move about on their own. It's especially important to provide the dog with a safe place to rest and relax that's inaccessible to the toddler. This will avoid the situation where the dog is continually followed, cornered and pestered.

Additional information

Blue Cross has a number of leaflets which offer guidance about a whole range of animals and issues.

For further information, see the Be safe with dogs leaflet, and our pet care leaflets, Caring for your adult dog (D3), How to play with your dog (D23) and Training your dog (D16).

Useful addresses

Association of Pet Behaviour
Counsellors (APBC)
PO Box 46 Worcester, WORCS. WR8 9YS
www.apbc.org.uk

Association of Pet Dog Trainers (APDT)
PO Box 17 Kempford, GLOS. GL7 4WZ
www.apdt.co.uk

Happy, healthy pets

Blue Cross advice leaflets are packed full of top tips to help owners with their pet questions. They cover a wide range of topics, from training a puppy to caring for an older cat. So if you need some support to help you with a pet problem, whether it's about a dog or a degu, we're here for you.

You can read and download our leaflets online at www.bluecross.org.uk

Visit our website to take advantage of all its features, including:

- blog posts from Blue Cross experts
- latest news
- events near you
- pets needing new homes

Or you can join in the chat on our online communities:

 www.facebook.com/thebluecrossuk

 www.twitter.com/the_blue_cross

Blue Cross

Blue Cross has been dedicated to the health and happiness of pets since 1897. Abandoned or unwanted, ill or injured – we do what's needed to give every pet a healthy life in a happy home. We're a charity, so the more help you give us, the more help we can give pets.

How you can help

Blue Cross doesn't receive any government funding, so we rely on the generosity of pet lovers like you. There are lots of ways you can help the sick, injured and abandoned pets in our care, like making a donation, fundraising for us or leaving us a legacy.

Please call us on 0300 777 1897 or visit www.bluecross.org.uk



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