



Your Dog and a New Baby

Health and Hygiene

-  Get your dogs' (and any cats') hygiene up to date with inoculations, worming and flea treatment and keep them up to date. Remember that if your dog is prone to fleas or if he has had them in the last two years, it will be as well to treat your home - well before the baby is born. Do ask for advice from your vet and midwife about the use of insecticides in the home.
-  Always wash animal bowls and bedding and so forth separately to human things, but don't worry excessively about dirt and hair and so forth. There is a lot of evidence that now shows that excessive cleanliness can adversely affect children's ability to fight infection. An all round common sense approach is needed. Talk to both your vet and midwife about how to keep the whole family fit and healthy.

Training

-  If your dog has any behaviour problems, deal with them well in advance of the baby's birth using kind, positive methods.
-  Do some obedience training to get your dog's standard of behaviour well up to scratch. Make sure you have kind, positive methods for getting your dog to do anything you need him to.
-  If your dog is of a good temperament and has been well socialised, you may want your dog to meet other babies in advance of yours being born. If

you would like some advice on the best way to do this, please ask for professional guidance, as the way such meetings are handled can have a huge impact on a dog, not to mention the children.

-  If your dog worries you in any way with regard to babies or children, remove him from the situation calmly but completely and seek professional assistance.
-  Teach your dog to wear a basket type muzzle - something that all dogs should be taught as you never know when it might be needed. You might feel happier about your dog being muzzled when he first meets the new baby as it will simply take the anxiety out of the situation allowing everyone to relax. This must be done well in advance though so your dog is very comfortable wearing one and doesn't associate it with the arrival of the baby. Please ask for the training leaflet about this.
-  Learn how to read your dog's body language - this is critical in spotting the early warning signs of stress, please see separate guidance leaflet.

Attention

-  Before the baby (or babies!) is/are born, start to reduce the dog's attention gradually until the baby arrives. You can start this as far in advance as 6 months. This is because no matter what your resolutions, you will not have as much time for the dog as when the baby arrives. This way your dog should not associate the reduction in attention with the arrival of the baby. This is especially important to remember if you are on maternity leave before the baby is born - don't indulge the dog while you have the time only to cut it all back suddenly.
-  Set up areas just for the dog and get him used to these areas well before the baby is born. Many places sell taller dog gates as well as baby gates which you will need later on anyway. Gates allow the dog to be separate from the baby or toddler but still observe and feel part of the family. This will give everyone space, especially in the early days when you are learning how to feed a baby and don't really want a wet nose in the way.

 Teach your dog about being separate from him by practising well before the baby is born. It is a good idea to borrow a doll that you can pretend to interact with. If your dog starts to get anxious, whine or bark ignore him but praise him when he's quiet. If the noise seems to be a problem, try settling him down with a stuffed Kong, *before* you sit down to play with the pretend baby. Don't give your dog any attention for unwanted behaviour before or after the baby is born - you will just reinforce it (see leaflet about 'Stopping Fido Doing whatever it is you don't want him to do!').

 Teach your dog games that he can play alone, or to keep him occupied while you feed the baby. Stuffed Kongs, Tug a Jug toys and treat balls are all good, hide and seek with his dinner is also good fun.

Exercise

 Consider employing a dog walker, they aren't terribly expensive in this area and even a couple of times a week can be a weight off your mind. If you start this a few weeks before the baby is born it will allow the dog walker to get to know the dog before the upheaval of the baby's arrival. You could also consider employing a cleaner for a few weeks after the birth, (this was the best money I ever spent after my second baby was born). This will free up more time for the baby and the dog.

 Do buy a pram/pushchair that will cope with dog walking terrain and also buy a baby sling to go walking with your dog and baby. A bit later on you can buy great 'backpack' type carriers.

 Before the baby is born, put a doll or teddy in a baby carrier and get your dog used to the idea of walking with you carrying something on you. If he jumps up, stand on the lead (assuming your dog wears a harness) so he can't jump (but allowing normal movement) and wait till he calms before moving off again. Repeat calmly and decisively until he gets the idea - normal walking = go for a walk; jumping up = halt.

 In my own experience, getting out with a new (or older) baby can sometimes feel like Mission Impossible, but it is well worth the effort. Leave the washing and the housework and just get out for the fresh air. Your dog will need it more than ever and so will you and the baby (or babies!).

Changes in Routine

 Consider where your dog travels in the car. If he is usually in the boot, will the pram fit ok as well? If he travels on a seat, where will the baby go? Your dog should be properly restrained in the car, either behind a dog guard or with a seatbelt, but should be separate from the baby. If this means he has will have to travel in a different place, get him used to it well in advance and have the baby car seat in place well in advance also.

 Will you need your dog to sleep somewhere different when the baby arrives? Hopefully not, but if necessary i.e. dog currently sleeps in what will be the baby's room, make the change well before the baby arrives. If your dog usually sleeps in the kitchen, there may not appear to be the need to make changes but if you are bottle feeding you may have to go down to the kitchen in the night. If so, don't interact with the dog at all and he will soon learn to sleep through the night feeds. The last thing you want is to be getting up to let the dog outside as well as caring for a new baby.

 Make failsafe arrangements for the care of your dog while you and your partner are in hospital for the birth or having a home birth. If your dog is to go to a kennel or relatives, make sure they have been there a few times before the baby is born. Leaving your dog in kennels for an extended time won't help at all, as your dog will need to get used to the baby, not be separated at this critical time.

Preparation for the Arrival!

-  As you start to buy baby things, allow your dog to smell them and get used to them. Put the pram up where you will keep it, allow him to smell the clothes, see the toys and explore the baby's room if your dog is normally in bedrooms.
-  Remember that some midwives/health visitors like dogs and some don't, just like the rest of the population. Those that understand dogs and babies will help you, so if yours is a midwife that doesn't know about dogs, ask to have one appointment with someone who does.
-  If you have any concerns about your dog's behaviour around children babies or small animals, contact a professional, qualified person well in advance of the birth.
-  When you bring your baby home, have someone else hold the baby while you greet your dog as normal. As hard as it may be, do allow your dog to be around *safely* with the baby and reward him with lots of praise and treats for gentle, calm behaviour. You may feel happier letting him wear a light 'house line' and a (pre-trained) muzzle so he can be calmly steered away or removed from a situation if needed.

Dogs and Babies

- Do make sure that you have a really good system for disposing of nappies or their contents if using reusable ones. Dogs are animals after all and nappy contents are rather attractive. Your dog is highly likely to eat faeces if given half a chance, don't get cross, just don't give him the chance. The absorbent material in disposable nappies can be dangerous to dogs if swallowed as it swells up and isn't digestible.
-  Try not to get cross if your dog picks up baby things or chews them. Remember that you want your dog to be happy to give things back, so exchange things for a treat and don't get into chase games. Try to keep baby things out of your dog's reach but remember that baby things will smell of milk and as baby gets older their clothes and anything they touch

will probably smell and taste of food. This may make your dog like the baby more, but the baby might get licked on the face if you don't take steps to avoid this.

-  Never leave your dog and baby alone even if for just a minute. Dogs and children can move very quickly and highchairs, play pens or cots are all easy to get in or out of for a dog or a child.
-  Your dog will be the last in line for attention for a while, so do make sure he receives lots of praise and attention while around the baby, thus making his experiences around babies very positive.
-  Don't fall into the trap of thinking 'my dog is great with the baby'. No dog is 100% safe 100% of the time so don't take **any** risks.
-  When your baby starts to crawl and walk, keep the dog separate to avoid accidents or ensure your complete supervision.
-  If you go on to have more children, follow the same ideas again. It won't be as new to him this time, but a second or third or fourth child will always mean a reduction in attention, possible house moves, and changes in sleeping place or car travel place.