

Babies change everything! If your dog has been the "baby" in your life then you'll want to prepare him or her for when the real baby arrives. It's best to start EARLY! You can even start changing his or her routine when you first begin planning to start a family. Here are just a few ideas about changes you may want to make before the baby arrives:



- Change your routine and rules long before the baby arrives so the dog doesn't associate the changes with the baby. For instance, if the dog will no longer be allowed in a specific room, start that rule as soon as possible.
- Decide on the rules regarding the baby early. Will the dog be allowed in the baby's room? Can the dog lick the baby? Where will the dog sleep? Who will walk him or her? Who will feed him or her? Deciding on these boundaries and then implementing them early will eliminate that stress later.
- Work on perfecting your dog's response to *verbal* cues. Often you will have your hands full with a baby and won't be able to give hand-signals. Since most dogs are cueing off of body language, make sure that the dog will respond even when you're in different positions or have your back to the dog (facing a changing table for instance).
- If your dog is a jumper, get that under control right away. A dog jumping up could easily scratch the baby. We also wouldn't want the dog stealing baby things (or the baby's food!) off a counter/table/highchair.
- If you'll be taking the dog on walks while using a stroller (and we would recommend including the dog in family walks), train the dog (before the baby arrives) to walk beside you while you are pushing a stroller.
- Teach the dog a "go to bed" cue so you can send him or her to a designated spot to keep him or her out of the way when needed.
- Teach a strong "leave it" cue. There will be lots of things he or she's not allowed to touch.
- If you're going to need to confine your dog using a crate, baby gate, or dog-safe room, then teach him or her to happily accept that now, before the baby comes.
- You can begin to teach the dog which items are his or hers by keeping his toys in a toy box or specific area. There will soon be baby toys and dog toys around and you'll want the dog to know which ones he's allowed to play with.
- Make sure you still give plenty of attention, mental stimulation, and physical exercise to the dog. Many dogs will "act out" when they aren't getting enough of those three things. His or her misbehavior has nothing to do with "jealousy" of the baby, it's simply a lack of attention, mental stimulation, or physical exercise.
- Set reminders for yourself (phone alarm, stove alarm, etc) to let the dog outside to potty. Often, housetraining accidents occur when a schedule changes. The family will be so busy with the new baby it might be easy to forget to let the dog out to potty.
- Enlist the help of a dog walker or Doggie Day Camp. New parents are often exhausted, physically and mentally, so there's no harm in letting someone else do the work for you until you can do it yourself.
- Have someone bring home blankets/shirts/etc with the new baby's smell before the baby comes home. That way the dog can have "checked out" the baby in a calm, stress-free environment. Don't let the dog "play" with those items, but investigating them is fine.
- When mom and baby come home from the hospital, have someone else hold the baby when they come in. The dog will be very excited to see mom since she's been gone a while and is likely to jump up and be a little rowdy. If mom is holding the baby there's a chance he or she might hurt the baby (which would stress out the parents), or the parents might be stressed about how he will react. It's best if this homecoming is like any other where mom's been gone a few days.
- Relax and keep the first dog-baby meetings calm. He or she just wants to check out this new "thing" in his or her environment. If you're relaxed and don't make a big deal of it, the dog will usually respond more calmly.
- NEVER leave a baby and a dog unattended. No exceptions.