



THE BLUE CROSS

Britain's pet charity

Your dog and your baby





TODDLERS

Pet owners should be aware that their baby will soon start crawling and toddling, and that it is important for them to remain vigilant once the child starts to move about of its own accord. It is especially important to provide the dog with a safe place to rest and relax, which is inaccessible to the toddler. This will avoid the situation where the dog is continually followed, cornered and pestered by the infant.

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. GL7 4WZ

www.apdt.co.uk.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The Blue Cross also produces the All About Pets range of leaflets, which offer guidance about a whole range of animals and issues. Please see our website www.allaboutpets.org.uk or contact your local Blue Cross adoption centre or hospital. Alternatively please write to the head office address below.



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THE BLUE CROSS HEAD OFFICE:
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Registered charity no: 224392

After the baby is born

FIRST INTRODUCTIONS

When a new mum meets the pet dog for the first time after coming out of hospital, the dog is probably going to be very excited. The best way to carry out this first introduction will be when the dog is tired - after a long walk and play session. Firstly, the dog should be reunited with the mother when she is not with the baby, as the dog is likely to get excited and jump up at her. Later, the baby should be introduced in a quiet room where the dog has few associations - not in a place where the dog usually sleeps or eats.

PRAISE YOUR DOG

Associate the baby's presence with positive, enjoyable experiences for your pet. When your pet is behaving well around the baby, give lots of gentle praise and tasty titbits. The first interaction should be under control with the baby being held in the adult's arms and the dog allowed to sniff the child. The dog will appear interested for few seconds and will then lose interest. When he backs away you should praise him and give him 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 is essential that your dog be 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 place the 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 for the baby's nursery allows you to keep the door shut, but still see and hear the baby.

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 your pet 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.



Start your preparations early

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 the baby comes into the house.

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



Before the baby is born

HANDLING

Your pet should be able to tolerate being stroked around the chest, shoulders, back, legs, tail and head without any problems. Handling exercises are to be done when your pet is calm and quiet - do not turn these exercises into a game or the pet may learn to wriggle, struggle and play-bite.

SOUNDS

Play tape recordings of a baby crying, gurgling and screaming for short periods, and always follow this with something your pet finds rewarding (e.g. give the dog a titbit or have a game). Repeat this procedure until the pet begins to associate the sudden onset of the crying noise with a treat.

NEW SMELLS AND OBJECTS

Get the dog used to baby powder, soaps, shampoos and baby milk by using them in the home in the weeks leading up to the 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 now, think about how much exercise he gets, if he pulls on the lead, comes back when called or whether he is aggressive to other dogs. Once the baby arrives you will have to manage any problems in addition to wheeling a pram or pushchair. In addition, new mothers may be in some physical discomfort after having the baby, so you will need to make sure that the dog can be physically controlled. If your dog pulls on the lead, you could purchase a harness or a head collar (e.g. a 'Gentle Leader') that helps to stop dogs pulling.

See how often friends or relatives might be willing to walk the dog while you are still pregnant. This will give you an indication of the amount of exercise he will receive if you are unable to take him out yourself. If you think the dog will receive shorter or fewer walks once the baby arrives then you need to change the routine a few weeks in advance. If the dog gets fewer walks he will need to use up his energy some other way, otherwise he will 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 him overweight and unhealthy. Try to compensate for fewer walks by playing more games with him and consider paying a responsible dog-walker to take him out for you.

TRAINING

Get your dog used to staying at home without you, by leaving him for short periods initially, and slowly progressing to longer periods. Consider joining a dog-training class. Visit the class without your dog before you book and always make sure the trainer is friendly and uses kind, reward-based methods of instruction without the use of choke chains and punishment.

FOOD

A large percentage of accidents occur when babies or toddlers approach a pet's food bowl, or when the baby tries to take a dog's bone or chew. Your pet will have to learn not to guard his food bowl and should learn how to take food treats gently - without grabbing the 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. Even the best parents in the world are unlikely to be able to give their dog the same amount of attention once the baby arrives. The pet will feel left out if it does not receive attention after the baby is born. Your pet will quickly learn to do things which force you to take notice of it (e.g. stealing nappies).

The best way to prepare your dog for a change in the amount of attention he receives is to try and reduce any contrast between the amount of attention he will receive before and after the birth. In advance of the baby's arrival, the dog should be taught to tolerate periods when he does not receive any attention from you. You should regularly give your dog attention for 20 minutes. Then, when the 20 minutes is up, you should completely ignore the dog for the next 20 minutes (no verbal, physical or eye contact) as should anyone else in the household.

TOYS

Dog toys and baby toys are often made of similar materials. Some toys even make the same kind of noise, such as a squeak. It is not surprising then, that some dogs become confused about who owns the toy.

Limit the number of toys that your dog has to two or three and pick them up and put them out of reach at the end of a game. This will teach your dog that you are the one in charge of the games. In addition, it prevents the baby from accidentally picking up the dog's toys and putting them in its mouth. Encourage your dog to give up their toy for you whenever you ask. Never be aggressive when you attempt to take the toy from the dog - otherwise you will teach him to guard his toys.

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 the dog to go to a place (e.g. a mat in the corner of a room). It can be close to you and makes the dog feel safe and happy. An indoor kennel (also known as a cage or dog crate) could also be considered for those times when the dog needs peace.

RESTING AND SLEEPING PLACES

You should decide if you intend to change where your pet currently rests and sleeps, once the baby has arrived. For example, if it lies on your sofa every evening and sleeps next to you in bed, are you happy for this to continue? If not, make all changes well in advance so the pet does not associate the change with the arrival of the baby.

HEALTH MATTERS

Make sure that your dog is in good physical health. Your dog 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 his threshold for aggression (i.e. if he is in pain, he will be less tolerant about being handled and more likely to growl, snap or bite).

