

Babies and Dogs

Early preparation and assessment is essential in any family with pets and an expectant mum. As soon as you know there is a new baby on the way, you and your family should 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 and of course your routines, not to mention sleep patterns once the baby comes. This forward planning 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 as far ahead as possible of the birth and not wait until mum is due home. The initial preparation should begin by placing the new furniture, baby walkers, bouncers playpens, cots, pushchairs, highchairs, changing mats and pushchairs in and around the home. Every entertainment toy for children these days tends to need batteries for the elaborate sound effects they make and getting your pet familiar with these noisy toys at an early stage is good preparation. Children tend to investigate with their hands so a tolerance of touch and being stroked is essential, especially around the areas that are reachable by toddlers, such as the chest, sides and tail. Handling exercises can be practiced well in advance making them positive and enjoyable for your pet.

One of the most curious things about a baby for any unsuspecting pet is the great range of sounds they can make. Playing recordings of a baby crying, giggling and screaming for short periods and following this with something your pet finds rewarding familiarizes him to these soon to be daily experiences. CD's containing baby sounds can be purchased from Dogdayz on 01952 261051. Making this a regular exercise before the arrival of the baby will soon have your pet sleeping through the real life episodes, which is more than you will be able to do! Along with sounds comes the variety of smells. Get the pet 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.

Your time will be at a premium when the baby arrives so think now about how much exercise your pet gets and any problem you might have. Dogs that pull, cause a nuisance with other dogs will be much harder to control with a pushchair so think about some training or buying new walking equipment that might help. The exercise routine will change too so get any dog used to the new routine as early as possible. You may want to compensate the shorter walks with more interactive games at home.

Before mum arrives home, some worn sleep suits should be left around the home, which the pet can be left to investigate. And when a new mum meets the pet for the first time after coming out of hospital, he is likely to be very excited. Introduce mum and pet without the baby and then later, the baby should be introduced in a quiet room. Associate the baby's presence with positive, enjoyable experiences for your pet. Give lots of praise and control initial interactions. Dogs will appear interested and cats will likely look on with disbelief. Keep routines as normal as possible and monitor all interactions when both pets and children are together. Keep both cats and dogs out of children's bedrooms and maintain strict hygiene controls at home and parasite treatment for pets. With early preparation most household adapt very well to arrival of a new addition to the home, when everyone can look forward to an enjoyable, fun and fulfilled time together.

Controlled introductions on the lead with two adults present, building relationships between babies and pets outdoors, walking the dog with the pushchair, being included and positive associations all help.