



YOUR NEW BABY

Help your dog to adjust to your new baby by following the advice below.

1. Getting Ready for the New Arrival

Ideally, begin preparations before your baby arrives. If your dog doesn't know how to sit, stay, lie down, or come when called, make sure you teach him to do so. If your dog already knows these commands but is unreliable, practice these exercises with your dog until he responds very reliably. Reduce the amount of attention you give your dog for 2 or 3 months prior to the baby's arrival - or it will be a big shock to him afterwards!

Once your dog has learnt the basic sit/stay and down/stay commands, ask your dog to sit/stay or down/stay as you do things that resemble "baby activities" around him. For example, pick up a doll, cradle it, rock it, and walk back and forth. Every so often reward your dog with titbits, petting or praise for remaining in a sitting or down position while this is going on. The doll can be wrapped in baby blankets and shown to your dog, so he can learn to control himself around your "baby".

Because dogs often become very inquisitive to strange sounds, it's a good idea to accustom your dog to the recorded sounds of a baby crying, babbling, or making other normal "baby" sounds.

If the opportunity is available, expose your dog (in a controlled manner) to real babies of friends or neighbours, and/or walk frequently past primary schools or nurseries. Otherwise use a noise CD, YouTube videos, or download baby noises from Dogs Trust for free (<https://soundcloud.com/dogstrust/sounds-soothing-baby-crying>).

Your dog should gradually be exposed to baby noises until he can be totally relaxed when he hears them.

If your baby is born in hospital, use these few days to familiarize your dog with the baby's smell by bringing home blankets or clothing the baby has worn each day.

2. Bringing Your Baby Home

When you come home from the hospital, it's best if you greet your dog without the baby present. Another family member (dad) should hold the baby or, better still, put the baby in another room while mum and dog greet each other.

Allow plenty of time for your dog to get used to the smells and sounds of your baby. It takes time for dogs to adapt to having another creature in the house. Once your dog appears relaxed, you can introduce the baby to your dog as follows.

One parent should attend to the baby and the other to the dog. Initially keep your dog on a lead. Let your dog see the baby from around 10 to 15 feet away. Then either your dog or baby should be brought closer to the other, slowly, one foot at a time.

If your dog remains calm and under control, you can allow him to sniff the baby, again from a safe distance. Don't try this if your dog is extremely excited or aroused, however. Take this stage slowly – it may take several sessions before your dog and baby are happy to be close by each other without the dog getting too excited.

Err on the side of caution when determining when your dog is ready to approach your baby close enough to actually have a sniff. Over a period of days, however, your dog should be able to smell the baby up close. Take your time.



3. The First Few Days - and thereafter

Remember, your dog must not have unsupervised access to your baby - **EVER**.

Be especially careful when your baby is screaming, crying, or waving their arms and legs. If your baby is crying it's best to keep your dog in another room or, if your dog doesn't seem too bothered by the baby crying, put him in a down stay or in his bed several feet away from the baby.

Use a baby gate at the entrance to your baby's room (and anywhere else in the home that you need to). This allows you to hear your baby but stops your dog's access to the room.

Dogs can often "act up" after a new baby arrives. It's unclear whether these behaviours occur because of "jealousy" or simply because your dog is being deprived of his usual, expected amount of attention and affection.

Try to make sure that your dog gets his own play time with you away from the baby every day.

One tip that can be helpful is that whenever you begin to do something with your baby, ask your dog for a sit/stay and periodically reward him with a titbit. This teaches your dog to associate pleasant experiences with the baby as you give your dog extra attention when the baby is present. You can give him a filled Kong or lick mat to chew on and eat while you feed the baby.

4. Monitoring Your Dog's Behaviour

All interactions between your baby and your dog should be monitored very carefully.

This monitoring should continue until your dog is either paying no attention to the infant or is completely friendly toward the baby.

Never leave a baby or small child UNATTENDED with a dog for ANY REASON.

Even if you're just popping to the loo, take either baby or dog with you (it doesn't matter which!), or leave your baby safely in a cot in a room protected by a closed baby gate.

Conclusion

Although you should be aware of potential problems, don't worry too much about the potential problem of your dog possibly injuring your baby. It's extremely rare for dogs to hurt babies.

Most dogs adjust to new babies easily, quietly and without incident.

Preparation and monitoring are key. The more you can do to prepare your dog for the new arrival, the better. Follow the suggestions in this help sheet.

If you watch your dog's behaviour and reactions carefully, and take precautions to introduce your dog and baby to each other gradually while your dog is under good control, you should avoid any problems.

Ask us for help if you need, sooner rather than later!