



BASIC PRINCIPLES FOR INTRODUCING PETS TO A NEW BABY

Dr.'s Horiwitz and Nielson

It is important to remember that no child should ever be left alone with a pet. Even the best pet may hurt a baby. Close supervision is mandatory when an infant/toddler and a pet are together.

Anticipate schedule and household changes that may occur when the baby arrives; try to implement these changes well in advance of the actual arrival of the baby. This may mean spending less time with the pets, pet segregation from certain areas of the house, teaching the pet to stay off the furniture, awakening at night, etc.

Practice tranquility training exercises (see handout) with your pet prior to the arrival of the baby.

Prior to the arrival of the baby, obtain a recording of a baby crying. One resource is on iTunes. Search for "Calm Pet Desensitizing Sounds for Animals: Part 1" In iTunes. You can buy the 5 minute single for .99 "CRYING BABY SOUNDS" by artist CALMSOUND <http://itunes.apple.com/us/album/calm-pet-desensitizing-sounds/> Play on low volume multiple times daily. During these sessions have the dog do basic obedience commands and reward good, obedient, calm behavior. Gradually increase the volume with successive training sessions until the recording is played at true "baby crying volume". If at any time during the training the dog appears to be agitated, return to a lower volume and progress more gradually. It may be beneficial to carry around a baby doll and to reward the dog for good behavior around the "baby".

Get the pet used to new baby product odors and furniture by having them in the house prior to the arrival of the baby.

Get pets used to pulling on hair and ears by initially doing it very gently and rewarding them for good behavior with a treat or affection. Gradually increase the intensity of the pulling until you mimic what a toddler may do.

Do not allow pets to get into the crib or sleep in areas where the baby will be sleeping and resting.

For particularly anxious dogs or cats, consider placing a pheromone diffuser in the house (DAP®- dog appeasing pheromone or Feliway® – cat calming pheromone) about 2 weeks before the baby's arrival.

After the baby is born bring some of the clothes the baby has worn home from the hospital for the pets to smell.

When you bring the baby home, have another person hold the baby so you can greet the pets.

Once things have calmed down, introduce your pets one at a time to the new baby. The pet must be controlled during the introduction. Leashes, halters or head harnesses can be helpful. Have one person hold the baby while sitting comfortably on a chair. Another person should be carefully monitoring your pet's behavior. At any sign of aggressive or unacceptable nonaggressive behavior (i.e. crawling on top of the baby) interaction between the pet and the baby should be immediately interrupted. Aggressive behavior should result in immediate isolation of the pet and you should contact your veterinarian. Unacceptable nonaggressive behavior should result in redirection of the pet to do an alternative behavior, (e.g., sit); desirable behavior is rewarded.

If there is only one spouse home at home during the first few weeks the baby is home, then the pets should be restrained or confined in the presence of the infant. Tethers, baby gates or crates may be helpful.

Usually when a new baby enters the household, the adults ignore the pets when the baby is active and give the pet attention when the baby is sleeping. Inadvertently, this teaches the pet that the baby is something negative (baby equals no attention) and that the absence of baby is a good thing. This is the opposite message we want to give our pets. Therefore, make a point of trying to pay attention to the pets when the baby is present/active. This can be done with verbal engagement or if two adults are present, one adult can attend to the baby and the other adult can pet or play games with the pets. When the baby is sleeping, you should pay less attention to the pets. *~

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This handout is provided by Dr. Jan Crowe of Creekside Veterinary Clinic, P.A. as a public service. Please contact Dr. Crowe at 843-824-8044 or your own veterinarian if there are ANY questions: If you're not sure of something, please ask!

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