

INTRODUCING YOUR PETS TO YOUR BABY

Before your baby is born - preparations and planning.

Pregnancy and pets

Many people suggest that their pets become more anxious, attentive, clingy and protective when they are pregnant. Pets can certainly notice the change in your behaviour and body posture, along with any changes in your daily routines. From a dog's point of view, some behaviours which were once welcomed, may be reprimanded or ignored e.g. jumping up. Whether pheromones play a part in this change is not fully understood, but pets seem to be able to pick up on these subtle changes.

Veterinary care

Make sure your pets have had a thorough check up with your vet before your baby is born. Ensure all their medications are up to date. Take the opportunity to discuss with your vet any health concerns you may have in relation to your pets such as toxoplasmosis, worms and fleas.

Evaluate your existing routines

Discuss with your family what is going to be practical when your baby is born. Where will your pets sleep, eat? Is it *necessary* to change anything? Where will you feed your baby when they start solids? Is it near where the dog eats? If you need to change anything, make sure you do it well in advance of when the baby arrives home, and do it gradually. For further help, contact the RSPCA Animal Training and Behaviour centre.

Provide for your pets needs

Who will walk and feed the dog/s, and who will spend time with your pets when your baby is born? Ensure your pets mental, physical and social needs are met both before the baby is born, and after.

Evaluate your pet's behaviour

Do they like kids? How do they react to new things or situations? Do they bark a lot and how will this affect your baby? Recognise and meet your pet's behavioural needs. Consult with the RSPCA Animal Training and Behaviour Centre if you have any specific concerns about your pet's behaviour.

The importance of training

Ensure your pets know basic commands, or refresh their training if your pet is older. Enrol your dogs into training classes with us! Teaching your pets to behave appropriately helps them to know what is required, therefore reducing stress.

Prepare your pets

Get your pets used to new items in the home such as prams, cots, musical mobiles, baby toys etc. Allow your pets to investigate them and create positive associations with these items. Also include smells such as baby powder and washes, and clothes and blankets from the hospital when the baby is born before the baby is coming home.

Teach your dog/s to walk nicely beside a pram or stroller before your baby gets home! This is an activity you can do together with your dog/s. Contact the RSPCA Animal Training and Behaviour Centre for loose lead walking advice.

Crate training

Having your pets settle calmly in a crate is invaluable, especially when your baby becomes mobile. Crates give your pets a place of their own to go or hide away when daily life gets too much, or if they are feeling a bit stressed. Crates are wonderful for shy or timid dogs and can help to teach high energy dogs to switch off. Keep crates as part of the furniture; don't just bring them out when you have visitors over to see your baby. See info sheet **Crating for Management**.

Plan ahead for your pets

Plan for your hospital stay and have a plan for your pets as well! Make sure your pets are familiar with friends or family who are coming to feed them, take them for walks or to play.

When you bring your baby home

Have someone else (e.g. a family member) carry the baby. This allows you to be free to greet your pets as usual. Then put your pets outside or in another room - perhaps use treats to do this. Then bring your baby inside and sit down at a table or sofa and get comfortable. Have someone bring your pets back inside (or do this outside if your pets live outside) and allow your pets calm investigation of the baby. Ensure you allow pets to smell the baby's feet first. Have some treats handy and make sure you reward your pets for being calm. Do not discourage curiosity, just manage it.



Ensure you create positive associations between your pets and your baby. Do not pick your baby up and then put your pets outside, or get angry at your pets. Instead teach and condition your pets to love your baby too! For example, when you are changing your baby's nappy, give your pet's yummy treats. Before long, your dog will be able to tell you if your baby's nappy is dirty!

Keep your pets entertained

See info sheet **Entertaining Your Dog** for suggestions on how to keep your pets busy while you tend to your baby.

When your baby becomes mobile

Ensure your pets have space to retreat and move away from your baby when they need to (crates and baby gates are great for this!)

Supervise each and every interaction with your pets and your baby, no matter how much you trust your pets, or your kids!

Learn to read your pets so you know the difference between enjoyment, tolerance and ENOUGH!! See info sheet on **Canine Body Language**.

