

Behavior Solutions: Children and Dogs

Bringing home a new baby is an exciting time for everyone in the house, including your dog. Routines that your dog has been accustomed to are likely to be disrupted, and you may not have the same amount of time to devote to your dog as you once did. Amidst all the changes and excitement, your dog may share more of your stress than enthusiasm. Preparations before and after the baby arrives home can help ease your dog's mind that a new member of the family doesn't mean he's out of the pack.

B.B. (Before Baby)

Just as you do, your dog has to get used to the idea of having a baby around the house. This probably means changes in your daily routine, unfamiliar noises in the house, less recreational time, among others. With nine months in which to prepare, you can help your dog ease into the transition of having this fragile new family member in the house so it is not a complete shock.

First thing to consider is: has your dog had exposure to young children? If so, how did he react and what kind of experience was it? If your dog was gentle and happy to greet them, it is a good sign that he gets on well with them. If your dog showed any signs of fearfulness or aggression, an evaluation from a professional trainer and behavior specialist should be scheduled immediately. A behavior specialist will be able to tell you the best course of action in dealing with the new family situation.

One way to prepare your dog for having a baby in the house is to get him used to your holding something in your arms while going about your daily routines. Dolls that make realistic baby sounds are available at many toy stores that can help your dog get used to you having something in your arms that makes sounds. Bring your dog to the area where your baby will sleep or play and reward him for remaining calm while there.

Obedience training is a must to help keep your dog under control when around your baby. Exercises like sit and place can be helpful in keeping your dog close to you while still attending to your baby. If your dog has already gone through obedience training, consider taking another class to refresh his skills. If he has never had obedience training,

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find a local certified professional trainer with whom you can take classes and who understands your new family situation and needs.

Try to expose your dog to many children in various age ranges in a safe, positive manner before your baby arrives. Ask friends or neighbors with children if they wouldn't mind letting your dog meet them. Make sure that the children you introduce are calm and gentle with your dog to minimize any excitement or anxiety. Have your dog sit, and if he is comfortable, have the children give him treats and calmly pet him. Do not force an introduction if either your dog or the child is uncomfortable in the situation. To do so can heighten the anxiety of the situation and make your dog more apprehensive of children. If you are unsure of how your dog will react to a child, have him wear a muzzle during the introduction until you are sure that it is safe to take it off. First condition your dog to wearing a muzzle before attempting to introduce him to a child. You can do this by having your dog wear the muzzle around your home and periodically rewarding him with a treat for calm behavior. Once your dog is comfortable wearing the muzzle, proceed with introducing him to children. Using obedience commands, like sit, can also help to make introductions go more smoothly.

Baby-Safe Training Exercises

A solid foundation in obedience for your dog will help you tremendously when bringing your new baby home. Exercises such as sit, off, leave it, place, quiet, and walking on a loose leash are bound to be utilized frequently. The Pro-Training Clicker can help you quickly and easily teach your dog these commands while making it fun for you both. The clicker works by marking the exact moment your dog does something you like with a clicking sound. Immediately after you click, reward your dog with a treat. The clicker is effective because the sound of the click is much faster than saying "Good boy," and it always sounds the same, while your voice may not.

The reason these exercises are important is you will have a way of communicating with your dog, as well as allow him more freedom around the house once the baby arrives. A dog that understands the rules of the house will be able to stay close with his family instead of being isolated to the yard or a crate. Isolating your dog can create more anxiety, possibly resulting in destructive behavior problems.

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Incorporate these exercises into your daily routine. Keeping your dog in a boundary stay while you are preparing or eating a meal, or while reading or watching television is one way to have your dog remain close. Be sure to calmly reward his quiet behavior often. Keeping a collar and leash (a tab leash or 4-foot leash without a handle works well) on your dog while you are home and supervising can also help direct him into various exercises. (Never leave a leash on an unattended dog.) Practice walking on a loose leash while taking an afternoon walk. You can even bring a stroller along to help your dog get used to walking next to it. The Pro-Training Collar can help to quickly teach your dog to walk on a loose leash. When your dog forges ahead of you, the circumference of the collar gets smaller, creating a mild pinching effect that discourages pulling. Reward your dog with praise and a treat when he stays close to your side while walking. Visit www.starmarkacademy.com for our complete Pro-Training Clicker and Pro-Training Collar guides with these and other useful exercises.

A.B. (After Baby)

With all the things going on when your baby finally arrives home, it is important not to forget about your dog in the baby bustle. Continue with your obedience exercises, and further incorporate them into your new routines. This will allow your dog to remain close to you and reduce his stress level. Have your dog remain on a boundary stay close to you while you feed or change your baby. You may even consider keeping another place bed in your baby's room if you will spend a lot of time there so your dog can stay close to you. (Refer to Starmark's Behavior Solutions: Place for more information on teaching your dog about the Place or Boundary Stay.) If you take your baby for a walk through the neighborhood or in a park, take your dog with you. Be sure to always reward your dog for his calm and quiet behavior around your baby. To do so will help keep all experiences your dog has with or around your baby positive. Even though you are busy, also allow time to spend just with your dog, whether it is playing his favorite game or a training session.

Your dog is bound to be curious about the small new person in your home, but will not understand how delicate your baby is. Keep your baby safe and supervise all interaction between your child and your dog and never leave them alone together. Even though your

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dog may not have displayed any signs of aggression towards children in the past, he is still capable of accidentally harming your baby. Even a small dog can seriously harm a baby. If you have put your baby down for a nap or will not be in the same room, keep your dog where you can still supervise him.

Bringing Up Baby

Humane treatment of dogs, and all animals, is an important lesson for children of any age to learn. Having a pet in the house with your child can be a wonderful learning experience for lessons like responsibility and animal treatment. As your child grows older and is better able to understand, teach him how to properly handle your dog, as well as other animals if possible. You may even contact a certified professional trainer in your area that can conduct a private lesson with you and your child to help teach things like how to approach an unfamiliar dog, how to take care of your dog, and basic body posture. Knowing how to approach an unfamiliar dog and how to read his body language can help keep your child safe, even when you are not there.

Have your child help you with some of the care of your dog, like feeding, cleaning up the yard, and even bathing to help them understand some of the responsibilities associated with having a pet. You may have your child accompany you on a trip to the vet when your dog is due for vaccinations to see what goes on there. Having your child take some responsibility for your dog will help him to understand that it is hard work to keep a pet healthy and happy, but the benefits are well worth it.

All in the Family

Your dog doesn't have to be left out in the doghouse with the arrival of your baby. At Starmark Academy we believe that a well-behaved and well-trained dog is a happy dog and a better companion. Each dog is unique, and so is each owner. That's why we use a variety of techniques, customizing your dog's training experience to suit his personality and your individual needs. Using our training techniques, which emphasize consistency and patience, your dog can still be your bundle of joy.

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Trainer Developed: Academy Tested

The certified training and behavior specialists at Starmark Academy created this behavior solutions guide with you and your dog's needs in mind. All products, guides and videos are tested and approved by the training directors of Starmark Academy, our accredited school for professional dog trainers. It is the hands-on experience of our training division, combined with the vast technical knowledge and experience of the Starmark Academy staff that allows us to bring you useful and unique dog training and behavior solutions. We train dogs just like yours every day; we work with pet enthusiasts just like you every day. Thank you for choosing Starmark, the world leader in pet education.

For additional pet solutions and information about our products, please visit Starmark online at www.starmarkacademy.com

Starmark Recommended Equipment

Pro-Training Clicker—A fun and easy way to teach your dog obedience commands. It's like saying "Well done," on time, every time your dog does something you like.

Pro-Training Collar—The training collar that will help you walk your dog instead of your dog walking you. It provides gentle control with an attractive design that works like a training collar without looking like one.

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