



Preparing Your Dog for Baby

By Lisa Patrona, Dip. CBST, CPDT-KA, ACDBC, AABP-CDT

Copyright © 2003 by Lisa Patrona, Dip. CBST, CPDT-KA, ACDBC, AABP-CDT

All rights reserved. No part of this booklet may be reproduced in any form without written permission from the author.

Preparing Your Dog for Baby

By Lisa Patrona, Dip. CBST, CPDT-KA, ACDBC, AABP-CDT

This guide will help you to make the experience of having a new baby around something that your dog enjoys, not one that she sees as intrusive or frightening.

Before we start, there are some things that you will need as we proceed. Here is a list of items that are necessary to properly execute the program.

- 1- A life-like toy infant doll and baby blanket
- 2- baby powders and lotion
- 3- A tape or CD of baby sounds like crying – go to www.dogwise.com and search under “sound sensibilities” if you need help finding a baby sound CD
- 4- baby toys
- 5- stroller, car seat, bassinet/crib, high chair, playpen – should have at least one month from due date

Unless otherwise noted, you will need these items immediately. Keep in mind that the more time you give yourself to work with your dog, the better.

The time to introduce your dog to the new baby is *before* the baby comes home. You may be thinking, “OK, well how do I do that if the baby's not here yet?” We'll get to that, but first consider the following:

The American Heritage Dictionary defines the word “train” as 1) “**to coach in or accustom to some mode of behavior or performance**”, and 2) “**to make or become proficient with specialized instruction and practice**”. This program is about **training** your dog, not throwing her into a life-altering situation that she's ill prepared for, and expecting (or hoping for) the best. Many people make this mistake, and then blame the dog when things don't go well. The unfortunate reality is that many dogs end up in shelters because no one took the time to train them properly for what was to come.

The reason for trouble between a dog and a new baby is not jealousy; your dogs' cognitive abilities are not that sophisticated. Problems arise because for the last year, two years, 3 years, etc., the dog had been enjoying her life with you and all the learned expectations that go with it, and the next, she's being treated like a second-class citizen...no more walks, games, attention when she wants it, sleeping with you, etc. The entire world as she knows it has been turned upside down! What has changed in the home and why are “mom and dad” acting so strangely all of a sudden? You guessed it...the baby has arrived, and the experience is one of upheaval and confusion, which is certainly not positive for the dog!

Since you are reading this, you obviously want to help your family (which includes your dog and the coming baby) stay together and exist in harmony. Good for you! So let's get started.

This program is about keeping your dog's perspective in mind, and training her well in advance for the changes that will inevitably come. Most dogs are resilient and can adapt to change well, if given the proper opportunity.

We will cover 4 main areas in this booklet:

- 1- Changes in day-to-day life between you and your dog such as schedules and activities
- 2- Sensory conditioning and habituation. Changes in smells, sounds, and sights
- 3- Changes in expectations of your dog's behavior. *If you haven't already done so, it is highly recommended that you enroll in a good positive-reinforcement based training class. Having a well- trained dog is critically important as you proceed with the program. Train a solid sit, down, stay, leave-it, drop-it, and recall (coming when you call) if she isn't already trained. Complete your training classes with at least 3 months time before the baby comes home if you can!
- 4- Do's and don'ts for the baby's arrival home.

Change is the operative word when we consider how the experience of a new baby will affect your dog. One of the most important goals for you in this program will be to plan for, and get her accustomed to, any and all changes likely to occur in all aspects of everyday life, once the baby is born!

Step 1: Changes in day-to-day life: Write your own list of things that will change once the baby arrives home. Be sure to really think about this and include everything about your dog's day-to-day activities.

Be as complete as possible. Some things to think about as you make your list are:

- 1) Attention and one-on-one time with you and other members of the family
- 2) Walk and exercise schedules
- 3) Changes in who will feed her, and when*
- 4) Changes in sleeping area. For example, if your dog sleeps in the bed with you, will she sleep there when the baby comes home? What if your dog currently sleeps in the room that will become the baby's? Make sleeping area changes as immediately as possible.
- 5) Toys. If you have toys for your dog that are similar to the baby's toys, slowly begin to replace them with toys that aren't so "baby like".
- 6) Crate-time when you-are home. This is a biggy! If your dog is not crate trained, it is strongly suggested that you crate train now. If you don't want to crate train, at the very least get the dog used to being "put away" securely in a room *when you are home*. This will make alone time, even when mom or dad is home, much easier for your dog to handle. Again, if you do these things now, the dog will not be upset or frustrated by it if and when it happens once the baby is home and you need to put the dog away to tend to the little one.

Step 1 – Actions to take: Set out to gradually introduce the new schedules and changes for all activities. This will require some planning on your part. You'll need to create a realistic schedule (based on what life will be like when baby comes) and get the dog acclimated to those changes starting now. Refer to your list often and be as thorough as possible.

* Note: If you don't feed on a schedule, now is the time to start. Feed twice per day, once in the AM and once in the PM. Be as consistent as possible and start instituting the change now. If you decide that one person will be responsible for feeding, that person should start serving the meal at designated times now.

Here's some more food for thought. If you typically exercise your dog each morning at 8:00 am, is it likely that this will continue once the baby comes? If not, change the walk and/or exercise time to reflect a more realistic "when the baby comes home" schedule. This may mean that you will exercise and or walk when your spouse comes home and can tend to the baby at 5:00 in the evening. Remember that planning on your part will mean all the difference once the baby comes home!

Make sure to schedule one-on-one time for affection and "snuggle time" between you and your dog every day. During this time, you should devote all attention and time to her. Plan this for a time when you know someone will be around to tend to the baby if necessary. If you choose from 8:00 pm – 8:30 pm for this, get started now and stick to it!

Step 2: Sensory adaptation and habituation: Helping your dog get used to the sights, sounds and smells of your new baby. This is where your props come in! The idea is to help your dog acclimate too, and see these new things as positives.

Step 2 – Actions to take: Start this at least one month before the baby is due. Give it more time if you can. The more prepared your dog is, the better.

- 1) Allow the dog to investigate the baby's room. The look of the room will have changed dramatically for her, so you want to help her get used to it. Use food and gentle praise to reinforce inquisitive but calm and relaxed behavior.
- 2) Wrap the doll in a blanket scented with baby smells like lotion and powder
- 3) Allow the dog to investigate the doll, rewarding her for relaxed and calm behavior.
- 4) Begin playing the CD of baby sounds softly, as the dog investigates the area and baby prop. Increase the volume a bit over the course of several days. You do not want the dog to sensitize to the experience or become frightened, so take it slowly. If your dog seems uncomfortable or stressed, lower the volume and only increase it when she's comfortable at the lower volume. This may take several days...don't push it!
- 5) Hold the baby prop, carry it around with you, and lay it in the bassinet or crib.
- 6) Call the dog away and out of the room. Reward her with a food treat for coming away when you called. Repeat this exercise often, and allow the dog to investigate the baby's room frequently.
- 7) Begin using the other items like the car seat and stroller, without the baby prop first. Roll the stroller around and reward your dog for being calm around the movement. Many dogs have never even seen a stroller, much less been around one that is moving!

- 8) Allow the dog to freely investigate all items, as you reward and gently praise her, and then begin to add the doll and the CD sounds.
- 9) With a helper, begin to sit on couches and chairs to tend to the “baby”, while the CD is playing. The dog must learn to be controlled in these situations. If necessary, she should be on a collar and leash – not to punish, but to control and teach the appropriate behavior. Your goal is to help the dog realize that mannerly behavior will be rewarded, and it is expected, when Mom is tending to the “baby”. ***More on this in step 3**
- 10) Practice as many situations as you can think of, keeping it positive for the dog. The idea is to make the experience as real life as possible, so that when the baby really is there, she'll be ready.

Practice every day, as often as possible. It is critically important that you make the “baby's” presence, in everyday life, as positive and real life as possible.

Step 3 – Changes in your expectations of your dog's behavior: Teaching your dog the behavior you'll expect once the baby is home. **Now this is another biggy!** It is not fair to expect your dog to know what you expect of her on her own. If you don't think she's acting appropriately now, *she won't when the baby comes home either.* This is probably the biggest reason that dogs don't make it in homes with new babies. Rover is a maniac, and there just isn't time to deal with him, having the new baby and all.

If your dog is not trained to respond to the request for a sit, down, stay, leave-it, drop-it and a recall (coming when called), you must train her now! Enroll in a good positive reinforcement class – please, no correction based classes (choke, pinch or electric collars!), especially when we're adding a baby to the mix. One big correction (punishment) in the presence of the “baby” or anything associated with the baby can create negative associations, *which is the last thing you want!*

Step 3 – Actions to take: train without the baby props first, and then begin to train in the presence of them. As you train your dog to be comfortable and mannerly around the “baby”, you will use the obedience skills that you've learned (or that she already knows) so that she'll know how to behave to your expectations around you and the baby once he or she is home.

- 1) Teach a solid sit on cue when you are holding the baby prop in your arms. The dog should not be permitted to jump on you! If you have a dog that jumps a lot, it may be easiest to have a helper hold the dog on a leash at a distance first to teach her that more calm and controlled behavior will be rewarded. Remember, get the behavior of sitting for you and the rest of the human family first, and then add the element of the baby prop in your arms.
- 2) Practice the sit and down/stay while you are tending to the baby's needs. Set this up in as many situations as possible. Feeding, bathing, changing, etc. remember to generously reward your dog for the behavior you want to see, and have a helper there to aid in controlling the dog on a leash if necessary.
- 3) Add the other props like the car seat. Practice entering the home carrying the car seat with the baby prop inside. Train the dog to sit as you come in the door. Reward appropriate behavior generously.

4) If you plan to walk your dog with the baby in the stroller, you'll want to practice that too. But if your dog does not already walk nicely with you on a leash, you need to work on that first. Seek the advice of a professional trainer for private lessons, or enroll in a positive reinforcement-based training class for help. Head collars can be very helpful for dogs that pull, and make the experience of taking a walk with you a much more enjoyable experience for both ends of the leash!

5) When the dog is good taking leash walks with you alone, begin adding the stroller with the baby prop inside. People might think you're a bit strange taking a toy baby doll in the stroller for a walk with your dog, but explaining that she's in training for the new arrival might just start a trend! After all, maybe they know someone having a baby soon that could use some good advice for helping to make the transition as stress-free as possible for their dog too!

6) Training a solid **leave-it (where the dog turns her head away from an object on cue)**, and **drop-it (the dog drops whatever is in her mouth)** is very important. Once the dog thoroughly understands these cues, use them to practice with baby prop items. I would suggest that you train the dog to leave-it with baby toys. It's better to have the dog understand that it should leave these items alone when asked, rather than relinquish them once she has them. Things happen though, and it is just not realistic to think that your dog will not arbitrarily pick an item up that she shouldn't have, whether it's a baby item or some other "forbidden" object. Drop-it will be used for these situations, so make sure to train it to a reliable level and set-up training opportunities with the props so she'll readily and happily relinquish whatever she's gotten a hold of. *** If there are any resource guarding issues (growling, snapping, snarling or stiffening) when you ask the dog to relinquish an object no matter what the object is, contact a qualified behavioral consultant/trainer immediately!**

7) Training a reliable recall teaches your dog to quickly leave an object or activity and happily return to you. Teach your dog to come to you when asked – which should include coming away from the baby and the baby's stuff (use your props for practice!) Be very generous with the rewards for quick and reliable responses!

8) Training your dog to enjoy alone time in a crate or another room while you're home will also be very helpful once your new baby arrives. Play the CD and practice putting her in her crate or another room with a Kong or sterilized hollow bone, filled with yummy stuff like peanut butter, canned dog food, or liverwurst. Make sure you use something the dog really likes for this, otherwise she may not see the experience of being alone while you are home tending to the baby as a positive thing. Gradually work to being able to put the dog in her "special place" for up to one hour.

9) Training effectively requires consistency, rewards and lots of repetition. The more you train, the better! When preparing for the arrival of your baby, you can't overdo it, so practice, practice, practice!

Step 4 – finally, the Big Day has arrived and the baby is born!

Step 4 – Actions to take:

1) If you plan to have someone else care for your dog, it would be best to arrange for the dog to stay in her own environment at home, with someone she is familiar and comfortable with. Kenneling should be

avoided altogether if at all possible. Too much upheaval before the big day will increase her stress level, and you want her to be as relaxed as possible when she meets the new family member!

2) On the day of the birth, have your spouse, or other family member bring home articles that the baby has worn such as a t-shirt and blanket, that are saturated with the baby's scent. Allow the dog to investigate and sniff, and leave the articles around the home for the dog to become accustomed to.

The Homecoming – Do's and Don'ts

Do

- [Have your spouse or other family member take care of the baby as you go in to greet your dog alone. You have been away and she has missed you. Give her a few minutes of welcome home time with you alone, before the baby is brought into the home by your spouse, family member or friend. At this point mom should take baby and go to another room for the next step.
- [Have your spouse, other family members and/or friends greet the dog solely as well, while the baby is in another room with mom.
- [Wait for the dog to greet everyone and calm down (depending on the dog, this may take a little while), before introducing the baby into the environment. Note: If the dog is still too worked up after 20 minutes, put her in her "special place" (you've done your homework right?) with a stuffed Kong or sterilized hollow bone and wait until the excitement has subsided and she is feeling calmer, to proceed.
- [Have someone other than Mom hold the baby and sit on a couch or chair for the formal introduction. Mom should keep the dog on a leash at this point – not to create tension or yank on the dog – just to provide control as necessary. Mom should have the dog sit, and as long as she does not lunge or jump, allow her to sniff and investigate the baby while praising gently. Keep this initial interaction brief and positive. Remember to pay attention to your dog too! It's very important that she not feel cast aside when the baby's around. You want her to experience pleasant emotions in the presence of the new baby.
- [Closely supervise and monitor your dog's behavior, especially for the first few weeks. You've done a lot of work to prepare her for this, so things should go smoothly – BUT – never take it for granted.
- [Remember to stick to the schedule for activities, feeding and alone time with your dog that you've introduced. She is accustomed to the new program now, so make sure to stick to it.
- [Use the behaviors that you've been practicing with the doll to help build the appropriate behavior around the real baby. Involve your dog in the daily routine of caring for the infant.

Don't

- [Take your dog for granted. Under NO CIRCUMSTANCES should your dog ever be left alone and unattended with the baby. The dog is to be supervised at all times.
- [Push things. If your dog seems initially uncomfortable, do not push her into doing something she's not OK with. DO NOT punish any fearful reaction – or – reinforce it with coddling. If your dog's reactions are making you uncomfortable, contact a qualified behavior specialist as soon as possible. The earlier potential problems are addressed, the better.
- [Dangle the baby in front of the dog. I know it seems like another one of those common sense things, but some folks take things for granted to the point of doing something like this that most of us wouldn't dream of!
- [Forget to always consider your dogs' perspective. After all, she is, and always will be, your best friend. Treat her with the patience and respect that she deserves!

Congratulations! You have taken the steps necessary to help your dog and the rest of your family stay happily and comfortably together during this transition. Done properly, this program will make the whole experience much less stressful for all of you!

Finally, if you have questions, or run into any difficulties please do not hesitate to call 248.244.1372 for further guidance.

Wishing you lots of success and happiness.

Lisa Patrona, Dip. CBST, CPDT-KA, ACDBC, AABP-CDT