

# A guide to introducing **dogs to babies and children**





# Dogs and babies

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Once you've heard the good news that you're expecting a baby, there are lots of things you'll need to prepare in time for your newborn's arrival, but remember, your dog might need some time to adjust to a new family member too. There are lots of things you can do to help your dog get used to your baby, even before the little bundle of joy arrives.

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## Before your baby arrives

### 1. Cradle a doll in your arms

While it may seem a little silly, a doll will help your dog get used to seeing you with a new member of the family around the house. Your dog will be able to get a sense of what the baby will look like and all of the places the baby is likely to be. Try doing this regularly throughout the day – you could even practise using a baby sling by carrying the doll around in it.

It can also be helpful to prepare your dog for some of the new smells which come with a newborn. You could do this by sprinkling baby powder onto the doll or by using baby-friendly shampoos and soaps yourself.

### 2. Play audio of a baby crying

As well as the sight and smells, your dog will need to get accustomed to the sounds of a baby. An effective way to do this is to play recordings of a baby crying at short intervals during the day. Start off at a low volume and gradually increase to avoid your dog feeling uncomfortable or getting distressed. They'll soon become familiar with the noise and won't be alarmed when it happens once your baby arrives.

### 3. Place new items around the home

As you buy your range of baby products, such as a baby carrier and pram, place these around the home with the doll inside. This allows your dog to get accustomed to new items and helps you to gauge how curious and accepting your dog will be. It also gives you a chance to establish boundaries early on should your dog begin to behave inappropriately around these items.

#### 4. Walk your dog and wheel a pushchair

Once your baby arrives, you're likely to be walking your dog and handling their lead while wheeling a pram or pushchair. This can take some getting used to and you may find the process a lot easier by preparing in advance by walking your dog next to a pushchair – even when the pushchair is empty. Alternatively, take your dog out for a walk with a friend or family member who already has a baby. Your dog may be nervous walking alongside a large pram at first so be sure to give them praise and treats to help build their confidence.

Remember, you should never tie the lead to the pushchair as this would be extremely dangerous if your dog lunges or leaps unexpectedly.

#### 5. Deal with any inappropriate behaviour as it happens

While we're sure your dog is superbly trained, if they do something that's inappropriate, such as jumping on furniture, deal with it there and then. You might think you'll establish boundaries once the baby arrives, but introducing a new baby and new rules at once is a lot for a dog to take in. It may also have adverse effects in terms of your dog resenting the new arrival.

Don't shout at your dog or use punishment as this will be ineffective. If you feel your dog's behaviour requires expert intervention, consider some behaviour classes. In many cases, a behaviourist will be able to visit you at your home.

#### 6. Make time for your dog

Dogs are intelligent and intuitive. During your pregnancy, they're likely to pick up on your emotions, including heightened stress levels. While there may be a lot to do in preparation for your newborn, your dog still needs to know that they're loved and wanted. Give them the time and attention they need to ensure they don't start behaving inappropriately.

If you have a lot of visitors coming over, such as health workers or friends and family congratulating you, keep a close eye on your dog's reaction and body language to make sure that they don't get overwhelmed. You can read more about the signs of a happy dog on page 9.



## 7. Create a comfortable nest to rest

Dogs should always have a quiet, safe place to retreat to when they need some rest or alone time. Ensure that your dog identifies this area as their designated space before your baby arrives and make this place as welcoming as can be by filling it with toys, a water bowl, some treats and a comfortable doggy bed. You can also use pheromone sprays or plug ins that will help your dog to feel calm when in their nest.

If your dog is used to sleeping on the sofa or in your bed, and you'd like this to stop when the baby arrives, work on changing this a long time before the baby arrives using lots of praise and treats.

## 8. 'Pet' your pet's ears

All interaction between your new baby and your dog must be actively supervised. As he or she learns to move around, your baby is likely to touch your dog in sensitive places such as the ears, nose, face, tail and between paw pads. If your dog isn't used to this, try to see how they react to this kind of attention before the baby arrives. Start with short and light touches and give your dog lots of rewards and praise. You must stop if your dog seems anxious or aggravated.

## 9. Put toys away after play

Dog toys and baby toys often look similar and it can be hard to tell them apart – it's no surprise your dog may get confused. Before the little one arrives, you may want to start putting your dog's toys away after the fun and games, in a place that isn't easily accessible. This will help your dog to understand that play time occurs when you produce their toys and can help them to avoid picking up other toys around the house that don't belong to them.

## 10. Ensure your dog has had their health checks

Before your baby arrives, it's essential that your dog is in good physical health. If not, they may have a lower threshold for aggression. It could also mean that it would be unhealthy for your baby to have close contact with your dog.

Confirm that your dog is up to date on their vaccinations and is free from fleas and worms. Even if nothing seems wrong, it's wise to take your dog to the vet for a routine check as your baby's due date draws closer.



# When the baby arrives



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The time's here for you to safely introduce your newborn baby to your dog. The following tips can help ensure that their first interaction is a positive one so that your dog doesn't become distressed or anxious as this could lead to aggression.

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### 1. Make the first interaction a pleasant experience

When you bring your baby home for the first time, your dog is likely to be excited to see you, so greet your dog without the baby in your arms. This is particularly important if your dog likes jumping up at you. To minimise the risk of over-excitement, try to carry out the first interaction once your dog is tired from a long walk or play session.

When your dog seems calm, introduce the baby in a quiet room and allow the dog to have short associations which are supervised at all times. Don't introduce the baby to a room where your dog usually sleeps or eats, as this can seem like the baby's encroaching on their territory.

### 2. Give regular praise and rewards

Whenever your dog displays behaviour you want around your baby make sure you encourage it by giving praise and rewards, like a tasty treat. Pets will often be patient and are likely to readily accept your baby's arrival, but do ensure you're giving your dog lots of attention too and recognising their good behaviour. Remember, even if your dog is behaving well, all interactions should be actively supervised and it's important never to leave your dog and baby alone in the same room.

### 3. Maintain hygiene levels

Many families that have a pet dog and a baby in the same household can be concerned about hygiene issues. If you need to ease your mind, consult your doctor or vet. The most important thing is to ensure your dog is treated for worms and fleas and that all of their vaccinations are up to date.

Always wash your hands with antibacterial soap after interacting with your dog, especially when feeding, grooming, cleaning or playing with your dog. Don't leave dirty nappies on the floor, as some dogs may be curious about them or regard this as a spot to wet or mess. To minimise the risks of this happening, place nappies in a bin that has a sealed lid and empty it regularly.

### 4. Supervise at all times with no compromise

Your dog and baby should never be left unsupervised even if your dog has never shown any signs of aggression before. If someone responsible can't actively supervise the interaction, keep your dog and baby in separate rooms.

If you still want to see and hear your baby when they're sleeping in the nursery, consider using a screen door or stair gate to block off access. This is also handy for baby – proofing your home.

### 5. Toddlers

When your baby begins crawling, it's likely they'll want to approach your dog, so be extra vigilant. Your dog needs a safe place to rest which is inaccessible to your baby so that he or she can retreat to it should they feel pestered or uncomfortable.



# Child safety around dogs



The connection between pets and children is heart-warming to watch and it can be very beneficial to have a dog present in your child's life. They can teach children how to care for, and be compassionate towards another living being. Recent studies also suggest that babies in homes with dogs build up a stronger immune system than those in pet-free households.

However, it's important to remember that not all interactions between dogs and children are positive. Unfortunate incidents can occur due to children not knowing how to behave around dogs and dogs not knowing how to behave around children. This is why it's essential to actively supervise all interactions between dogs (even if it's your own) and children. If you're not able to, securely separate the two until you can focus your attention on them and read the following tips to help.

## When shouldn't your child approach a dog?

Your child shouldn't approach a dog that:

- **Is sleeping or in their bed**
- **Is eating**
- **Is in their kennel or in a car**
- **Is under furniture such as a table or chair**
- **Is sick or injured**
- **Is trying to move away**
- **Is with their puppies**
- **Is playing with a toy.**



## What are the signs of a happy dog?

Dogs that are happy will often be easy to identify through more positive body language. For example, a happy dog often has:

- A relaxed body
- Ears forward or relaxed
- Their tail and body wagging
- A face that seems interested and alert
- A relaxed jaw with a hanging tongue
- A non-aggressive bark used to get your attention.

## Is it OK for your child to pat other people's dogs?

It's natural for children to want to interact with dogs that they come into contact with, but there are some things to bear in mind:

- They should gain your permission and that of the dog owner before any contact
- If the owner says yes, ensure your child holds the back of their hand out with fingers slightly curled in (so that it doesn't form a fist)
- If the dog sniffs your child's hand, ensure they know to pat it gently under the chin or on the chest, but not on their head
- If the dog backs away from their hand, ensure they know not to try to interact any further.

## What are the obvious signs of an unhappy dog?

Dogs often make it clear when they aren't in the mood to be approached or disturbed. Avoid approaching a dog that's sleeping or in their bed

- Runs away and hides
- Moves away and then rolls on their back
- Shows their teeth, snarls, barks or growls
- Has raised hair on their back or a tense body
- Crouches low with ears flat against their head
- Has their tail tucked between their legs
- Raises their paw, yawns or licks their lips
- Is showing any signs of being stressed or anxious

## What should your child do if a dog approaches them?

Whether it's your pet or an unknown dog that approaches your child in a threatening manner, should the worst happen, your child should:

- Look away from the dog and not maintain eye contact
- Stand still and don't run as the dog may chase
- Avoid making any loud noises or sudden movements
- Keep their arms by their side
- Your child should allow the dog to move away and find a responsible adult.



For more information, please visit:  
[pdsa.org.uk](http://pdsa.org.uk), [apbc.org.uk](http://apbc.org.uk), [dogstrust.org.uk](http://dogstrust.org.uk) & [bluecross.org.uk](http://bluecross.org.uk)