Introducing a Puppy to the New Baby

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The arrival of a new baby is a blessed event, but the family dog may not see it that way. There may be issues of territory and jealousy. Some may advise keeping the dog and baby apart until the child is old enough to understand how to behave around dogs, but that is not really a practical solution when the dog is an established house pet. You need to let your dog know that he is not being replaced in your affections and that this new baby is part of the family.



Dogs that have a dominant personality or high prey drive (breeds developed for the purpose of hunting and killing rats and other small animals) may pose a hazard to infants or very small children if they are not properly socialized and their natural tendencies controlled by obedience training. The dog may see a helpless, mewling baby as prey. Breeds with dominant characteristics comprise about 40% of all breeds recognized by the AKC, but dogs within a breed will have varying degrees of the dominant personality.



Your Dog's Acceptance of the Baby May Depend on His Own Upbringing
Much of what shapes the dog's character is also how it is nurtured as a puppy. Dogs who are overly indulged by their owners, or who are poorly socialized, are more likely to become aggressive. Dogs who have had unpleasant experiences with young, teasing children will not be as accepting of a baby as those who have been raised around children and love them.

Familiarize Your Dog to Baby Sounds and Smells Before the Blessed Event
Babies have strange smells and make strange noises that the dog may not understand. If this is the first baby your dog has met he will certainly be confused by this new thing. Find or make a recording of a baby's cry. Play the recording occasionally during the day, softly at first and then increasing in intensity, so the dog becomes used to this strange new sound.

After the baby has arrived, before mother and baby come home, have a family member bring home a blanket that has been used to wrap the baby. Show the dog the blanket and let him sniff it to acquaint himself with the baby's smell. The dog should be petted and reassured so that he knows this is a "good" smell. Don't give him the blanket to lay on or play with, however. Teach him that baby blankets are not his before the baby comes home to keep him from accidentally jumping on the baby if you lay him/her on the sofa beside you.

Teach Your Dog to Respect the Baby's Territory
You may prefer to keep the dog out of the nursery, to avoid having him jump around and try to get involved when you are caring for the baby. Choose the room you will use for the baby before the arrival. Keep the door closed when you are not home. When you are home you may leave the door open and train him to stay out. Do this training with positive reinforcement so he doesn't feel punished for entering the room. This lets your dog know that this room is not his territory and he won't feel "put out."

Introduce Your Dog to the New Baby Gradually
The day that mother and baby come home, have a family member place the baby in the nursery while mother greets the dog. By now your dog may be having a little separation anxiety, wondering where Mom is. Mom should pet the dog and fuss over him a few minutes before introducing the baby, so the dog knows he is not being replaced in her heart.

When introducing your dog and the new arrival attach a short leash to the dog's collar so he can be controlled if necessary. Bring the baby into the room, holding him/her about 10 feet away from the dog. Your dog will sniff the baby's familiar scent (from the blanket) in the air and will be curious about what this scent looks like. Bring the dog and baby closer together, and carefully watch for any signs of aggression in the dog's behavior. If Sparkey growls, simply put the baby back in the nursery or remove the dog from the room. You may mildly reprimand the dog, but don't scold him severely. Try the introduction again later.

Remain Calm and Relaxed
Whenever you care for the baby, be calm and relaxed. This lets your dog know the baby is a good thing and welcome in your home. This may be easier said than done, especially for first-time parents! Dogs can sense our anxiety, and any anxiety on the part of the parents may indicate to the dog that this little bundle of joy is a problem.

Be the Leader of the Pack
The dog owner should be the leader of the pack. In dog hierarchy, whatever the leader says is good will be acceptable to the subordinate dogs. Let your dog know this new baby is part of the pack family now. Some dog owners, who can't properly handle a dog with a dominant personality, will allow their dog to run the home. This is when you will have problems getting your dog to accept the new baby.

Your Baby's Safety is First Priority
Keep a close eye on the baby and never allow him/her to be left alone with any dog unsupervised, even one you think you can trust. Dog owners who feel their dog may be a threat to the new baby have the choice of trying to keep the two apart or finding a new home for a beloved pet, both of which can be difficult. Ultimately, it is the safety of your baby that should take priority.

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