

Pets and Your New Baby

Preparing for a new baby in the family is exciting. Big changes are on the way for everyone involved, including your pets, so you'll want to start getting them ready well before you bring baby home for the first time. Your goal is for all the changes to be gradual so that your pets aren't overwhelmed by the arrival of your new baby.

Before Baby Arrives

Take your pets to the veterinarian for a checkup, to make sure their vaccinations are up-to-date and to have them spayed or neutered if they're not already. This is a good time to ask your vet for a lesson on clipping nails if you need it; you'll want to help your pets get used to having their nails kept reasonably short so as not to scratch your baby as they grow.

Think ahead to what the changes in your routine will be so that your pets can get used to those in advance as well. If you'll have less time to spend entirely with the pets when the new baby arrives, start gradually reducing that time now. Make sure there's still special one-on-one time with each of your pets; you'll want to incorporate that into your routine after baby comes as well.

Make a safe, quiet place for each pet to have of their own and begin getting them used to it before the baby arrives. You want to make it a place they can go by choice and that you can use to confine them for short periods if you need to. Cats in particular should have easy access to a safe, comfortable spot away from baby, and later, toddler. Spend some time each day with your pets in their safe havens, and give them good things to do there, such as food-stuffed chew toys or treats.

Get your pets used to the sounds and smells of a baby in the house. Play a recording of a baby crying and making other baby-type noises, first very softly and gradually louder as your pets get used to it. Bring home the lotions, powders, and other baby products that you'll be using for the baby and apply them to yourself.

If there's a nursery or other area of the house that your pets will need to stay out of, put up a baby gate (or even a screen door, for pets who jump gates).

If your dog hasn't been through a positive obedience class with you, sign up for one. If they have, you can start right away teaching your dog to calmly stay while you carry a doll around, sit in a rocking chair, use a changing table -- whatever you'll be doing with a real baby. If your pets haven't learned already, teach them to wait to jump up in your lap until you give them permission.

If you can, borrow a baby! If you have friends or family with babies, your pets can start meeting them now -- all meetings should be carefully supervised, of course. Make sure that when babies are around, your pets aren't always hearing harsh tones of voice or being told what not to do. Use food rewards and plenty of positive attention for your pets to help them associate the presence of small humans with good things for them.

After Baby is Born

As much as possible, have someone bring home items that smell like the baby before mother and child even get home. Pets will have a chance to get used to the baby's scent. When the new mother comes home, have someone else take the baby to another room so that pets can have a reunion with mom with everyone feeling relaxed.

When the time comes to introduce pets to the new family member, make it a calm, pleasant experience for everyone. Don't force pets to approach the baby if they're not ready, and reward them for all calm behavior around the infant. If your pets are very excited, you can put them on leash and help them to sit, stay, and be rewarded. If they're too excited, they can always take a break in another room to calm down, then try again with plenty of rewards for calm behavior.

As you spend time with your new child, involve your pets whenever you can. The time you spent on training before your baby arrived should mean that you can have your pet calmly next to you while you feed or bathe the baby, for example. If you've taught your dog to walk nicely next to a stroller, you'll be able to take family walks.

When you feed your baby, give your dog a food-stuffed chew toy filled with something really delicious like natural peanut butter or bits of meat or cheese. This creates a positive association with the baby as well as giving the dog something to do while you're otherwise occupied.

Make sure, though, that your pets continue to get the exercise and attention they need -- any pet's behavior will deteriorate without it!

Even if your pets seem to be welcoming to the baby, **NEVER LEAVE YOUR BABY AND PETS TOGETHER UNSUPERVISED**, not even for a few seconds. Even calm, placid animals can behave unpredictably around the strange sounds and sudden noises of babies and toddlers.

For more pet care tips, visit [spca.org/pettips](https://www.spcasoftexas.org/pettips)

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