



Lake Stevens  
Animal Hospital

303 91<sup>st</sup> Ave. NE Ste. A106

Lake Stevens, WA 98258

425-377-8620

[www.lakestevensanimalhospital.com](http://www.lakestevensanimalhospital.com)

## How To Introduce Your Dog To Your Baby

If you are a pet lover and you are pregnant, one of your biggest concerns is how to introduce your dog to your baby. Many people wonder how the dog will react to a newborn baby. Before bringing a baby home families question the adjustment a pet will have to make when he will not be first on the list of loved ones anymore. Some even debate whether a dog can adapt to a newborn presence and how the couple will introduce a dog to a baby.

These are normal concerns. Pets are animals, and they can't always understand why their favorite human is not playing with them as much anymore or why they can't act the same to the infant. Their lives are changing, and no one can explain why. It just seems to happen.

The options on the human side are pretty clear – no longer have a dog or start preparing to introduce your dog to your baby. Most people who have dogs know there really isn't a choice. The dog is a member of the family, a responsibility that can't be discarded, and needs to adjust to the upcoming changes.

### **When to Start**

The best time to start to introduce a dog to a baby is before the baby is even born. You are going to want to add new habits and rules slowly and give the dog time to learn them. If your dog has a habit of sleeping with you, you're going to have to slowly oust your pet from his sleeping spot and train him to sleep elsewhere. What will your new schedule be?

If feeding hours and walk time will change, start making the changes before the baby comes home.

Don't restrict your dog from being anywhere the baby will be. Many individuals decide that baby's room is off limits to the dog, but that isn't a wise choice. The dog, if he had free reign of the room before, can certainly continue to wander the room. There will be new smells and objects, and the dog will soon learn those things are no big deal by being exposed to them.

Training and preparing to introduce your dog to your baby should never be a sudden affair. Like humans, dogs don't appreciate abrupt changes to routine and need time to learn that the room is off limits or that the bed is no longer one the dog can sleep in. This adaptation period is important to start before the baby arrives for two reasons: The dog will have the new habits in place by the time the newborn comes home and the dog will not associate the new baby with sudden restrictions.

### **How to Arrange Introductions**

Your dog needs to have a chance to be able to smell and approach your newborn right from the start – and that's even before you bring baby in the door. Take an item of clothing or a small blanket that your baby is using at the hospital and bring it home to let the dog sniff at it to familiarize itself with the scents clinging to the fabric. That way, once your newborn does arrive, the baby's smell will be more familiar.

Do not swoop in the house with your new baby right away. Have someone hold the baby and take the time to go see your pet. After all, you've been away for a few days and your pet will be excited. Some dogs tend to jump and paw at people, which is something you don't want happening while you have a baby in your arms. Give your pet a chance to work out its excitement and get your full attention for a moment to tell your dog that you missed it too.

Then, you need to introduce your dog to the baby when things have quieted down. It's best to restrain the dog gently to avoid excited bumps, poking noses and scrabbling paws. A good way to introduce your dog to your baby is to harness or leash him, and have someone else hold the baby a distance away. Your dog will be able to smell the baby from afar and hear noises. The dog should know that a baby isn't a bad thing representing negative consequences for your pet.

Encourage your dog, pet him and provide reassurance, and always speak in calm tones. Sound bright and happy. This is a pleasant affair. Your dog might seem wary or cautious, or particularly curious about a squawk or the smells, so give him plenty of time to adjust to what's happening and going on in the room.

### **Almost Shaking Hands**

Eventually, your newborn and your pet will need to get a little closer.

Continue to have your dog on a leash, but allow some sniffing and your dog to poke his nose at the baby. Again, stay calm, talk positively, give plenty of reassurance, and make the experience a good one. Licking isn't acceptable, and you should stop your dog from licking the baby. Dogs can certainly learn that close smelling, friendly bumps of a shoulder, or tug of war games with a new baby are no-no's and accept those rules easily.

Aggressive behavior isn't okay. If a dog growls at a child or shows signs of aggression, that is the time to reprimand the dog. The dog must associate that aggressive behavior equals negative consequences, and that if it wants petting and attention from you, then it has to be nice to the baby. When your pet obeys, immediately reinforce its behavior with something positive. A soothing, "Good boy," some petting, and some reassurance will do nicely. A break might be in order as well. After some time has passed, you can try again. Never force the issue.

### **The Next Three Weeks**

Your dog and baby will get used to each other on their own time, and it isn't always love at first sight. Try to go about your business without making anything else a big fuss, and give everyone some space to adjust, dog included. Some dogs take as much as three weeks to accept a baby into the fold (and to lose some attention as well, when baby displaces your pet as number one).

During this period, always supervise the dog and make sure that there are no signs of aggressive behavior. Some dogs feel a strong predatory instinct towards infants, and you can never tell whether it will be the gentlest pet that has these feelings or not. In fact, many suggest restraining the dog in some way so that it can never get within reach of the child in the first weeks. A full body length of your dog is a good distance.

Regardless of how well your pet and child do end up getting along, never leave your dog and baby alone together unsupervised. Even after the three-week observation period, when it is time to let your dog roam free again, continue to observe its behavior. Dogs remain animals of instinct and often react on those same instincts, especially with toddlers who can pull fur or tails painfully. By the time your child reaches that age, though, good social interaction between pet and child should make the matter a small one to deal with, thanks to you taking the time to introduce your dog to your baby properly.