

Bringing Home Baby: Preparing your Dog...

Adapted from Cesar Milan

It is important to prepare your dog(s) for the arrival of a baby into your home.

A dog must consider everyone in the family to be in authority over him. Make sure you have your own relationship with your dog right. Get professional help if there are any aggression or authority issues. Mastering basic training and reliable response to commands is a must.

Dogs, whether dominant, overly excitable or overly dependent, have their own 'issues' when the pack order is changed and may react strongly. As difficult as it may be, you'll need to desensitize your dog by acting a little more 'detached' and decrease the amount of time spent interacting with them –if you spend a lot of time together –long before the baby comes home. It is a good idea to teach the dog to sleep in its own bed or crate. The baby's room should be off limits. Teach him to walk politely alongside an empty stroller or carriage. Encourage and reward any calm, submissive behavior.

Once the baby is born, bring home clothing that the baby's scent is on and introduce your dog through the scent. Set boundaries for this. The dog must first 'sniff' from the other side of the room, then instruct him to come slightly closer but not any closer than you would allow him near the actual baby. (In nature, a mother dog will make others in its pack keep at a distance from her puppies.) Remember that the dog is required to be calm and submissive around the baby's scent. Calmly correct any anxious or fixated behavior by making the dog move further away. Reward calmness.

When the baby comes home, have the dog put away so that the baby is in the house before the dog is allowed into the area where the baby is. Again have the dog give the baby 'space' as you hold it and only allow it to approach in stages as it maintains calm submission.

You must remain calm and assertive in this interaction. Speak slowly and deliberately.

Yelling only agitates a dog and does not make you appear to be in control.

Always be present in a room where a dog is present with a baby. Do NOT leave a baby unattended with a dog. Dogs should never be left alone with children that are learning to walk or those full of kinetic energy. This can make your dog overly excited. Sometimes they will start to chase, nip and even knock down smaller children. As your child grows, teach him or her how to interact with the dog –with respect: No tug of war, hitting, getting the dog riled up. Teach them games that reward calm behaviors. For example, when the child is old enough, supervise having them feed the dog. Dog must sit quietly as the food bowl is placed. Teach a dog to sit politely when the ball is tossed before allowing it to fetch, etc. Instruct children how to meet a dog. .No talk, touch or eye contact until the dog is comfortable and calm/submissive.

Children and dogs can be wonderful companions if they are properly introduced and supervised. The parents, as leaders of the pack, are the ones who set the rules, boundaries and limitations for the rest of their family pack.