

INTRODUCING YOUR PET AND BABY

Children and animals can be best friends, but they each need proper introductions for the friendship to form. Research (and our own observations) tell us that the bonds that develop between companion animals and children contribute immeasurably to children's development and attitudes with lifelong implications, but these ties are formed slowly. Please read "**Introducing Your Pet and New Baby**" by The Humane Society of the United States as well as some of the recommended books and websites.

Introduce gradually and before the baby arrives - Pets, especially dogs, need time to adjust to a new family member. Dogs may find it confusing and invasive when a new pack member arrives. A dog socializes in linear packs, which means it may consider some family members as dominant and others as submissive. The dog will probably see the new baby in a subordinate position and may display dominate behavior. Begin reviewing basic skills to "sit," "down" and "stay" before you bring the baby home to give the dog directions for desirable behaviors. If there are any behavior problems (especially food/toy/space guarding, strong prey drive or fear of strangers), resolve them now!

Practice with a doll - It may seem silly, but let your dog and cat become accustomed to all of the new equipment and smells now. Hold a doll just like a baby and let your dog practice an appropriate greeting, obedience skills and staying calm while you coo, change, rock and hold the doll. There are CDs of baby noises available to help with the process. Change your pets' feeding and exercise routines.

You can keep your cat - Toxoplasmosis is easily avoided by practicing good hygiene and responsible pet care. Let someone else clean out the litter box. If you must clean it, wear disposable gloves and wash your hands thoroughly afterward. Cats are less social than dogs and may choose to ignore the baby.

Toddlers and older children must still be supervised - Never leave your infants and young children unattended with the dog. Even an affectionate pet can unintentionally cause great harm. Toddlers and young children can trigger prey behavior or fear responses. More often than not, you will be protecting your pet from your child at this stage. Young children have no perception of the pain they inflict when they "play" nor of your pets' need to be left to sleep and eat in peace. Praise your children for gentleness and correct them for rough and unkind behaviors toward your pets. Children should learn that dogs naturally chase, herd, catch and fetch; many of their movements and sounds may cause these responses.

Every pet has limits - it is unfair to everyone to allow your children to continually harass a beloved pet. Even the most reliable pet has a breaking point. We want your pet to have a "forever" home, but sometimes it may be necessary for the safety of your child and pet to place the pet in a different home. With even the best precautions, some pets may never get used to children and will always have to be supervised.

RESOURCES

Childproofing Your Dog - Brian Kilcommons

Don't Shoot the Dog! - Karen Pryor

There's a Baby in the House - Mike Wombacher

Kids and Pets www.homevet.com/petcare/kidspets.html

Dog Bite Prevention www.doggonesafe.com/dog%20communication.htm

Baby's Arrival www.ddfl.org/behavior/babyarrival.htm

Why Dogs Bite www.sPCA.bc.ca/AnimalCare/whydogsbite.asp