



# Behavior and Training Department Tips and Techniques

## And Baby Makes...

Bringing a new baby home can be a wonderful time in a new parent's life - even when home includes a four-legged brother or sister. The Marin Humane Society realizes that a new baby in the house can be stressful for new parents and MHS is here to help you in your transition to create a happy new home life for all involved.

It is common for families to need help in integrating a new baby to existing canine and feline roommates. You have a wonderful new child to take care of, new busy schedules to juggle, yet, you are often burdened with a guilty feeling that the pets are no longer getting the attention they were used to getting. Also, you might be concerned that the loving Fido that was such a great companion to you might be a little clumsy, a little too kissy, or even a little rough or possessive with a new baby.

### WHAT CAN I DO?

#### Plan ahead

Most household pets accept new children when it's handled correctly and if you plan some in advance. Dogs and cats can tell when you are pregnant, so the sooner you start planning for your pet after your family planning starts, the better you will be. With a little planning ahead, some basic training and behavior modification, and a change to the rules around the house, your extended family can all learn to get along and adjust to the new baby.

- **Make sure your dog knows where his/her place is in the pack (family).**

Dogs are pack animals and there is no equality in a pack. For awhile you and your significant other have been "top dog" and you need to make sure all humans remain "top dog" over Fido in your household. Dogs will always try to determine where the new arrival falls in the existing pack hierarchy, and it is a new parent's job to show their canine how much higher the baby is in the pack than the dog.

Additionally, dogs that tend to show protection of their pack will need to learn that the new baby is definitely part of the pack and higher in rank than the dog. If you are concerned already about a dominance problem in the pack order, contact the MHS Behavior and Training Department.

- **Work with a Trainer or Behaviorist to discuss your dog's and family's individual needs.**

The MHS's Behavior and Training Department is ready to help you plan during this transition time. We have a behavior hotline (415-506-6281) to assist you with any questions about changing the routine or you can make an appointment to speak with our consultants about your individual situation. There are many private trainers and behaviorists who use humane, positive methods of training – ask for recommendations from other new parents or from family or friends, or check with the Association of Pet Dog Trainers (1-800-PET-DOGS or [www.apdt.com](http://www.apdt.com)) for a trainer in your area.

- **Be flexible and patient with yourselves as you try to juggle your new life.**

This is an exciting, yet often difficult time for you! Most pets will cope with the change and would prefer to be with you under most circumstances rather than being surrendered or given up to a new home. In a short time, most find that it all does work out in the end. With some simple tips and preparatory steps, you can make your extended family live harmoniously.

- **Get the facts.**

There are urban myths and non-truths regarding pregnant women and their contact with pets (e.g. cleaning litter boxes). While toxoplasmosis from a litter box is a concern, it is usually not contracted from your healthy household pets (women get it mostly from gardening) and can be avoided by taking simple precautions.



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### Before the baby comes

- 1. Teach your dog how to sleep and relax in one area of a room.** If the dog is used to being inside most of the time, teach it early how to act and be at rest in the house. It is always best that the pet be able to stay in the house when the baby comes home instead of being banished to the garage or backyard when it is not used to that routine. Give your dog a very comfortable blanket or dog bed; place it in an area that is within a high traffic room, but just out of the way. Give your dog attention when it lies on the blanket and give it toys when it relaxes on this blanket. This will become his/her place when the baby comes and ensure that it can continue to be included in the family unit. Use tie downs if needed to aid in this behavior modification. (See below.)
- 2. Practice using tie downs around the house for placement and containment of your dog.** Though not a punishment, tie downs are two to three foot long cable leads bolted to the wall or wrapped around immovable furniture, for your dog to be clipped to in high traffic area rooms. (These are not to be confused with tie-outs which are often longer leads, tied in a yard to a tree or fence, and which we do not recommend.) Always attach a tie down to a dog's flat collar – never a choke, pinch or constricting collar - and only have the dog on a tie down when you are home and can be with the dog. Practice using tie downs 15 min three times a day. Tie downs teach the dog how and where to relax in a busy environment.
- 3. Figure out now how your dog will get the exercise it needs once the baby comes.** A tired dog is a well-behaved dog. Just as you may be feeling a little claustrophobic at first when the baby arrives, your dog will feel it twofold. Dogs internalize a tremendous amount of stress and are quite sensitive to the added stress a new baby brings to the household. As with people, exercise is a wonderful stress release for animals. If you can make it through the first few months, you will find yourself with more breathing room to figure out what works and doesn't and be able to plan a longer-term strategy for your dog's needs. Figure out if you and your spouse will be willing to take turns walking the dog. Find a neighbor or friend who jogs and ask if s/he would include Fido on their outings a few days a week for the first few months while you are getting settled. Hire a responsible dog walker or pay a neighborhood teen looking for a few extra dollars so they can keep your dog walked and tired.
- 4. Prioritize what is important to you and figure out what you might be able to hire someone to help you with for awhile.** You and your spouse were thinking about getting a housekeeper anyway? Or, tired of mowing the lawn? If you hired someone to take over these household chores for a little while, you can free up your schedule for more quality time with the family and all the four-legged friends around. Plus, less chores for a little while!
- 5. Take a class now with your dog to work on his/her general obedience.** Teaching your dog the concepts of "Leave It", "Wait", "Drop", "Come", not jumping up, and walking nicely on leash (and next to the stroller!) will make your life so much easier when you are juggling a baby and a dog. Although it may look a little odd, give yourself and the dog an opportunity to take a walk with an empty stroller. Let you and your dog get used to the noise, the feel and the positioning as you walk, without the added stress of a baby in it. Keeping up the training only takes about 5-10 minutes a day, and what a way to maximize your time with your dog after the baby comes – practice training to get him/her tired and well-behaved!
- 6. Work now on any possession issues your dog has around food or toys.** Possession aggression is a natural dog behavior but can be extremely dangerous around small children. Call the MHS Behavior and Training Department for an appointment to assess your dog and set up a program to work on possession. If you start early, you can work on these important issues and have a nicer dog because of it!
- 7. Figure out now when your dog gets the most attention - and where.** If your dog is used to a post-dinner/during TV play romp, shake up the schedule now, or commit to keeping that up come baby time. If your dog is going to have to ride in the far back of the car when the baby comes, start having him joy ride in the back now. If there are rooms that will be off-limits to the pet, start keeping your pet out of the room now.



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8. **Spay/Neuter your pet.** Less frustration from the pet, less tension with the child.
9. **Crate Train Your Dog.** The crate can be an immensely useful and effective tool to keep your dog with the family unit, yet out from underfoot. But most importantly, dogs internalize stress and will need a place to go when family and friends “drop in” and come to visit Junior. While the garage or backyard excludes Fido from the family, contributing to more stress, the crate can be a familiar and peaceful place for a dog to go, and be quiet while the house is full of people.

### When the baby comes

1. Dogs crave attention – so begin an attention modification program when the baby comes. Generally, the rule of thumb is the **dog gets attention only when the baby is present, and gets ignored when the baby is out of the room.** It is common for families to call the dog over and give it some needed loving once the baby has finally gone down to sleep. But, in reality, that teaches the dog that he only gets attention when the baby is out of the room or not around. So work on talking, smiling, praising your dog when you are holding your baby, and in the same room or in the yard with the family. Throw your dog treats or yummys when you are sitting playing with the baby, nurse the baby near where the dogs lounging spot is and hand feed the dog part of its dinner. Then the dog learns – bring that baby back! I want some more treats and attention! The MHS Behavior and Training Department, or a qualified trainer can assist you with a program plan to work with your dog on your attention modification program.
2. After the birth of the baby, **bring a blanket home that the baby slept in for the pets to smell or sleep with before the official arrival.**
3. **The first dog-baby introduction should be with little fanfare**, little talking and mostly calm behavior by mom and dad. While you all might be a little nervous and very excited, praise your dog calmly around the new baby, and then just sit in silence for a time as all get used to everyone involved. Have Fido drag a leash around (just to prevent jumping, not as a correction) and allow Fido to lie near baby and parents on a down, and getting attention and treats when he is calm and relaxed.
4. **Allow your dog time to rest in quiet.** Use crates or a quiet special room where your dog can go to “check out” when she has had enough, especially during times when there are lots of visitors in the house. Watch for signs that your dog is stressed and needs your intervention to get some quiet time.
5. **As babies become mobile and older**, greater care will have to be taken to keep everyone safe and happy. **Children should never be left unattended with an animal.** Children step on tails, fall down on sleeping dogs, dogs accidentally knock over wobbly toddlers, and children simply do not have the physical control you need with an animal. So, just like you would not leave your child unattended, you should not leave an animal (who is child-like) and a child left to their own devices. Use a gate or pen to keep crawling baby and dog separate, yet together, in the same room. Or, **crates** can be very effective to keep baby and dog separate, but together.

### If Problems Arise

If your pet is showing signs of aggression or other problem behavior, or you truly believe your children are in any danger, keep your pet and children away from each other and seek professional help immediately. Oftentimes, rank reduction for the dog effectively ends many dog-child conflicts. Children also need to be taught to respect their pet and that sometimes, the pet needs to be left alone.

### It Is Never Too Late

Even if you didn't start a program early, start now!

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