



**Canine
Partners**

Amazing dogs. Transforming lives.

A photograph of a pregnant woman with long brown hair, wearing a light-colored top, sitting on a couch. She is looking towards a golden retriever dog that is sitting next to her. The dog is looking back at her. The background is a bright, indoor setting.

**Preparing your
canine partner for
your new baby**



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Introduction





Becoming a parent is a wonderful, exciting and busy time. There is a lot to prepare for and learn about. Whilst there are lots of resources to teach you as a parent, there are very few about how to prepare your dog for your new arrival.

Sometimes dogs can have difficulty adjusting to the change in routine that a new baby inevitably brings. To a dog babies smell strange, they are unpredictable in the way they sound and move, which can cause the dog to startle. There will also be a reduction in the exclusive time and attention you will be able to give your dog. All of these changes can make it hard for your dog to cope.



Top Tips

Things to consider early in your pregnancy:

-  Do you need to refresh any basic training?
-  Are there any new behaviours that it would be useful to teach?
-  What physical changes need to be put in place before the baby arrives?
-  What training can be started now to prepare for the sights and sounds that a new baby will bring?



Contact your Canine Partners staff contact early in your pregnancy to help you create a training plan. This will give you plenty of time to implement and train for success.

Good basic obedience matters



With a new baby, and for at least the next few years, a lot of your time and focus is going to be taken up with them. For your dog to be included in most of the day-to-day activities, it is worth spending some time refreshing their basic cues.

Inclusion in the daily routine is essential for the development of the familiarity bond. It allows the dog to see the developmental changes as they happen, and they can build a level of comfort and trust.

We suggest these basic cues are a good place to start:

- 🐾 Sit
- 🐾 Back up
- 🐾 Leave it
- 🐾 Go to place/bed
- 🐾 Settle
- 🐾 Down
- 🐾 Wait
- 🐾 Drop it
- 🐾 Greeting visitors calmly
- 🐾 Keeping four feet on the floor

Are there any behaviours that need to change before your baby arrives?

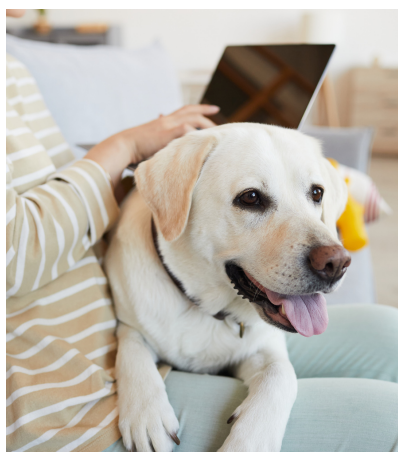


Changing the rules

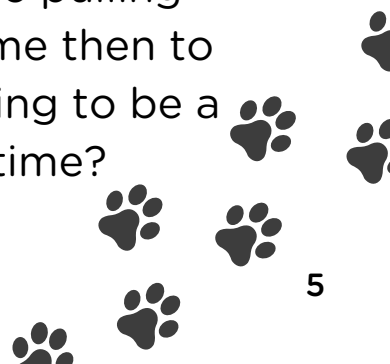
Some questions to ask yourself; How does your dog ask you for things? How do they get your attention? What works for them? How much structure do you have in your day? What types of enrichment do you use?

Depending on what they do to get your attention, you may find that it would make you frustrated or sharp with them once the baby is there. What they currently do may not be safe or appreciated. This can make dogs panic as what had worked in the past no longer works; they may get creative to get your attention.

Remember some dogs will work for negative attention; it does not matter, as it is attention from you.



For some behaviours, even if you feel they are ok when you have a babe in arms, by 9 months most babies are pulling up and standing etc. and you will not have the time then to teach the dog a new behaviour. Think - is this going to be a safe comfortable behaviour in 3, 6, or 9 months' time?



Plan to teach alternative more appropriate behaviours now. For example, if getting down on the floor has been the signal to your dog that it's playtime with you, when you get on the floor to play with your baby this will be very confusing to the dog as this was their signal to play.

Change the meaning of the cue 'getting on the floor' ahead of time, so it is the signal for your dog to go and settle in their bed. Change the cue for playtime with you for the dog to do something safer. Teaching your dog to settle using enrichment toys and food puzzles whilst you are engaged with your baby will be invaluable both in occupying and providing them with an outlet for some of their energy.



Ask your Canine Partners staff contact for our training sheet for settle in place training.



Using separation with comfort

Are there rooms or places in the house where you do not want the dog to go once the baby has arrived? Perhaps you have been happy for them to sit on the sofa with you, sleep on your bed, or in your bedroom but, with your impending arrival, you may want to restrict their access or change where they sleep either on a temporary or permanent basis.



It is important to decide this early on, so you can plan and train the new behaviours well in advance of bringing your new baby home. By the time they arrive, the new house rules should be well established and the dog will not link them to the new baby's arrival.

There may be areas where you will use a baby gate to separate off an area e.g. the baby's bedroom in the early days. Training the dog to be able to settle and relax on the other side of the gate will be important. One large area for frustration can be once your baby starts to move and crawl, and you cannot separate them because the dog will whine and paw on the other side of a barrier. Train place and settle cues, and practice often so that they are comfortable on the other side.



It all looks the same!

Some baby toys will look just like a 'dog toy', and your dog is not going to be able to distinguish which ones are theirs. Using a toy box for your dog's toys and having the baby's toys in separate areas, along with well-trained, calm 'drop' and 'leave' cues will help with this. If in the past you have played with things like bubble machines with your dog then they may find it exciting and confusing if the baby is playing with them.

Keeping play areas separate and providing enrichment toys for your dog whilst you are playing with the baby will help. It's important to be patient and help them to adapt to the changes so that they understand when you are playing with certain toys it is all about the baby and you want them to settle.

Having your baby safely on your lap, whilst playing a game of fetch with your dog will help with family inclusion. It gives the dog a clear signal when play is for them.



It all looks different!

Babies arrive with a lot of 'stuff' and quite often it's all the equipment that surrounds the baby that the dog finds stimulating, especially if they have not been exposed to it before. What will delight your baby may worry your dog. When they are very young your baby may spend more time in your arms, but as they grow the equipment around them becomes more exciting and may move or make noises. Spend time getting your dog used to the sight, motion and sound of new baby equipment before putting the baby in it.



Some bouncers or chairs have a vibration setting that dogs (and cats) can find upsetting because of the frequency. The chair will need to be on a sound-absorbing surface e.g. a rug or a carpet to prevent this. It is important to find these things out in advance and make adjustments before your baby is sitting in it.

Babies have a very strong startle reflex where they go from being quite still to their arms and legs suddenly jumping out. They experience strong emotions that can change from one minute to the next. Your dog may find these quite startling. When your dog and baby are in the same space, there should always be an adult in between the baby and the dog.



Planning and preparation

Some people like to use a practice doll swaddled to you, or in your arms to help get the dog used to seeing you carrying the baby. It is important to use something that has weight to it, as it will be more life-like making you move differently and it will also move more unpredictably. Remember to talk to it as you would your baby, pass it back and forth between you and your partner. See if your dog will still respond to cues, or do they jump up to see what you have? Finding out what they will do early in your pregnancy will give you time to train more appropriate behaviours.



Dogs have sensitive ears and an amazing sense of smell. There are recordings available of baby sounds that can be helpful. Pairing the baby sounds with an enrichment activity for the dog, like a frozen treat dispenser toy, where the volume is gradually increased over several training sessions, can help them to get used to baby noises to a certain extent.

Remember that when your baby cries you will also move to attend to them. Getting your dog used to you getting up and moving when you hear crying and rehearsing what cues you will use for them e.g. its just xxx (babies name), 'it's ok', 'go to your bed' etc. will help when the time comes.





Babies and dogs should always have adult supervision if they are in the same space, with the adult in between the baby and the dog. If you are moving from one room to another for a while, unless someone else is caring for the baby's needs, you would bring them with you. But what will you do if you're just leaving

for 'a few seconds'? This is often overlooked; what happens if you need the toilet, the doorbell goes, or you want a drink from the kitchen? Is it easier to cue the dog to go into a gated area, bring the baby with you, or have a playpen? It does not matter, just make sure you have a plan.

Does your dog know you're pregnant?

Some people will say that their dog's attitude to them has changed; they are more protective or fearful as their pregnancy progresses. There are changes that your dog will notice:

- 🐾 You may be sick a lot in the 1st trimester.
- 🐾 As your baby grows your body language, the way you move, and your body shape will change.
- 🐾 Your hormones change which will affect the way you smell and you may experience different mood swings.
- 🐾 The way you breathe will change especially after seven and a half months.
- 🐾 You may tire more easily and as a consequence, your dog has less exercise.






For some dogs these changes may be enough to worry them, they know things are changing but are not sure how to respond.

Providing them with enrichment outlets like searching for food or scent work may help. Calming products, such as diffusers, sprays, and collars, can also help and may be very useful over the initial period when you bring your newborn home. Your Canine Partners staff point of contact can advise you further on this.



Top Tips

During your 3rd trimester think about what preparations you need to put in place for your dog:

-  **Vet Visit:** Is there anything you need; e.g. sufficient flea and worming treatment to get you through the first few months?
-  **Supplies:** You may want to bulk purchase everyday items like dog food. If you are using calming products, having some spare will be helpful in case you need them.
-  **Dog Walker:** If you think you need some help exercising your dog, through late pregnancy and early days with your newborn. Finding a dog walker early, that you and your dog are comfortable with, is important.
-  **Canine Enrichment:** Having some pre-prepared items like frozen treat dispensers for when you first come home will make those early days easier for you and your dog.
-  **Birth Plan:** Have arrangements in place for who will look after your dog whilst you are in hospital. It is always wise to have a backup person for this as well.

Bringing your baby home

If you were to search on the internet for advice about introducing your dog and newborn baby, there is a large amount of information out there - most of which is fairly poor and outdated.

One of the most common pieces of advice is presenting the dog with a baby blanket to smell. This is based on the idea that this exposure will create some sort of positive association for your dog. In reality, it would take doing this many times and paring it with something tasty for the dog to get this kind of response, so unless your baby is in hospital for an extended period there is no point to this. One-time exposure in this context is not that important to a dog, it just makes us feel good.







In reality, the arrival of your newborn should be as much of a non-event as possible for your dog; they do not need to be introduced to your new baby. Typically people tend to raise their voices sound excited and draw attention to the baby.

We suggest the following for when you bring your baby home:

-  Come in and greet your dog first without the baby, this will help you manage the dog's initial excitement at your return without you worrying about the baby.
-  Keep everything as low-key as possible; remember the more excitement you pair with the new baby's arrival the more excitement your dog will pair with it too.
-  Just as with the baby blanket, they do not need to be presented with the baby to smell; dogs have an incredible sense of smell and they can already smell them.
-  Give your dog something to do; this is a great time for them to settle in their space with a pre-prepared frozen treat dispenser.
-  Over time, with exposure when you are both more relaxed, there will be opportunities for them to come closer whilst you are holding the baby and become more acclimated.



-  As you settle into your new routine and gain confidence, your dog can gradually be included more in the daily routine. This should not be made into a big deal for the dog; it's just a new way of life.
-  For the first few days, you may want to have a trailing leash or use tethering with enrichment feeding for the dog at times until you are comfortable with feeding or changing your baby.
-  The less concern or stress you put on the first few days about their interaction or non-interaction, the more your dog will relax.
-  With having refreshed their basic manners cues during your pregnancy, they will be able to be included more easily in the day-to-day activities.



Top Tips

Once you are home:

🐾 It is important that you and your dog still have some exclusive time as they were used to this and it should be maintained.

🐾 Make sure that you have a support system in place, especially in the early days, as this will be a big change for all involved.

What are safe interactions?

We do not want to draw your dog's attention any more than necessary to your baby or magnetize the baby to the dog. Throughout your child's early development stages, the best course is for them to live in parallel without interaction unless it is parent-guided. Dogs tend to find babies and toddlers, who by their very nature are unpredictable, quite stressful. There are so many images that may look 'cute' but in reality are neither wise nor safe for the dog or the baby. Here are a few examples.



The dog's body posture, the set of its ears and eyes all show a level of discomfort. The baby is reaching out to the dog without parent guided touch and could grab or pull at the dog. Babies do not have great fine motor skills or any concept of being gentle; this will not happen until they are much older. However, the dog is in a position where it can choose to leave. It's this type of interaction; 'can you see the doggie', 'can you stroke the doggie' that leads to babies being magnetised to dogs.



This picture shows a dog that is even more uncomfortable. You can see it in the stiffness of its posture, the way its mouth is closed and pulled back, and the whale eye towards the baby. The dog is also trying to lean away and get more space between itself and the baby. Whilst the baby is being held by its mum, she is not in between the baby and the dog. The baby is leaning against the dog, which also cannot move as it is being held in place.



There is no adult in between the baby and the dog at all in this picture. Should the baby startle, it will spook the dog too. The dog's head is over the baby. It is far too interested in the baby. These types of situations are dangerous for both the dog and the baby.

As they start to become more mobile, allowing your baby to climb on, crawl over or crawl up to your dog, is putting both of them into a risky situation where the dog will invariably be uncomfortable. Even if your dog does cope with this, other dogs may not. A young baby that has learned to do this will not be able to distinguish between different dogs or situations at this age.





A safe interaction

This picture shows much safer proximity and inclusion for both the toddler/young child and the dog. The adults are in between them and the dog looks relaxed, comfortable and not particularly interested in the children's presence.



Please contact your Canine Partners staff point of contact to discuss if you have any concerns about your canine partner, puppy or dog in training and your children.

