

# Introducing Pets to a New Baby



Congratulations on the upcoming or recent addition to your family. A new baby in the home is an exciting time. While you have been preparing for the baby for quite some time, your pet has not had the benefits of mentally preparing for this new addition. While your pet is used to living with humans, an infant presents a whole new set of challenges. Preparation can help make the transition less stressful and safer for everyone.

Above all, it is important to remember that no child should ever be left alone with a pet. Even the best pet may hurt a baby. **Close supervision is mandatory when an infant/child and a pet are together.**

## Before the baby's arrival:

- Anticipate and implement any schedule and household changes (*e.g.*, put up baby gates, limit access to certain areas of the home, furniture, etc.) prior to the arrival of the baby.
  - If your dog/cat usually sleeps in your bed and you will not be allowing this after the arrival of the baby, make sure that transition to a new pet sleeping spot occurs well before baby's arrival.
  - If the litter box will need to be moved, do this well in advance of the baby's actual arrival.
- Create a safe zone for your pet that the baby will not be allowed in.
  - Allow your pet free access to this area.
  - This could be a room or crate that is comfortable and has bedding, toys, water, litter box (for cats).
  - Practice segregation sessions in the safe zone prior to baby's arrival so your pet doesn't associate segregation with the baby.
- Acclimate your pet to the sounds of crying babies via recordings-pairing exposure to the sounds with play or treats.
- Acclimate your pet to baby product odors, furniture and toys by having them in the home prior to the baby's arrival.
- Create a plan to maintain your pet's current exercise and enrichment requirements once the baby arrives
- Address (or seek training for) any obedience issues (*e.g.*, jumping up) that may be dangerous with a baby.

## When the baby comes home:

- When you first bring the baby home, have someone else hold the baby so that you can greet the pets.
- Once everyone is settled in the home, introduce pets one at a time to the new baby.
  - Dogs should be on leash and all pets closely monitored for signs of aggressive or unacceptable nonaggressive behavior (*e.g.*, jumping on baby).
  - If undesirable behaviors occur, immediately interrupt the interaction between the pet and the baby.
- Be proactive, not reactive: If there is a situation that you anticipate the pet will not do well in (*e.g.*, diaper changing, nursing), then close the door or segregate the pet in its safe zone before starting the activity.
- Always provide active adult supervision when pets and babies/children are together. Provide your pet with adequate attention, enrichment and exercise.
- Any aggressive behavior directed toward the baby should result in immediate isolation of the pet from the baby and you should contact your Banfield veterinarian.
- Keep in mind that as the baby matures, there may be new challenges for the pets and these may require additional management /training strategies.

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For additional information, please contact your Banfield medical team.

### What not to do:

- Avoid ignoring or constantly scolding the pet around the baby and then showering attention on the pet when the baby is napping/sleeping.
  - This could create an undesirable association in the pet's mind (baby present = bad; baby absent = good).
- Don't forget your pet's healthcare: With a young child in the home, it is critical that your pet has appropriate parasiticide prevention and wellness care to prevent against disease transmission.
- Do not force the pet to get close to the baby.
- Never leave a baby unattended with a pet.
- Do not wait until there is a serious injury or crisis to seek help.
- Do not make an impulsive or rash decision to relinquish or re-home your pet.

