



Prepare the Dog for Baby: Dogs and Baby Equipment

By Jennifer Shryock

One of the most basic ways parents can help prepare their family dog is to expose them to the baby equipment prior to its use with an actual baby. I advise that Grandparents, Guardians and childcare providers that have dogs also take these simple steps to evaluate their own dog and circumstances.

I recall how wonderful the baby swing in particular, was for moments of peace and quiet as well as much needed arm rest. A recent article (<http://www.cnn.com/2005/HEALTH/parenting/02/23/baby.swings.dogs.ap/index.html>) addresses valid concerns about dogs and mechanical swings. It is important to keep in mind that all dogs react differently and supervision is a must all the time!

I have seen first hand a variety of reactions to baby equipment by different dogs. Some dogs become desperate to chase and catch the moving swing while others seem to find it soothing. A human moving in the air is not normal to dogs and can be quite confusing even though the swing is grounded. It is important to know your dog's reaction to different situations and stimuli. Here are some things to take into consideration:

1. Does your dog love to chase ANYTHING and everything?
2. Is your dog reactive to sudden motion?
3. Does he startle easily?



4. Is your dog sensitive to noise? If so, loud, soft or sudden? High or low pitch?

Adults in charge of supervising a baby must never allow the dog to remain in the room alone with a baby for even a second! This is a consistent key factor in most reports of attacks with newborns and dogs. This point must not be taken lightly. If the adult is not there for the dog to defer to and the baby makes noises the dog may be the first to respond and possibly tend to the baby. This is very dangerous as dogs communicate and relate very differently than we do as humans. What can caretakers and parents do to prevent such incidents?

It is best to introduce baby swings and all baby equipment to the family dog prior to the arrival of the baby. Baby swings have all sorts of gadgets these days! They vibrate, make music and even rotate. It is important to know your dog's individual sensitivities and prepare him well ahead of time. Some points to consider with baby swings:

1. Once in motion some dogs find the natural desire to chase hard to control around baby swings.
2. The noise of a vibration device in the swing can have an irritating humming noise for some dogs.
3. Spinning objects that are meant to be visually stimulating to an infant may be enticing to a dog to catch.
4. Noises of the music may be irritating to some dogs' sensitive ears.

It is important that family dogs learn how to behave calmly around all baby equipment prior to its use with an infant. Practice before your baby is home with a doll in the swing. Some dolls make noises and



blink eyes etc. It sounds silly but it does help you role play and visualize the real situation. This allows a time for your dog to safely explore as you teach him how you want him to behave. Reward positive and appropriate behavior. Make this a positive experience. Ignore unwanted behavior and teach desired behavior. You do not want the first time your dog sees this new equipment to be when you REALLY are hoping the baby will go to sleep! Many dogs learn that the swing is just part of the new furniture and ignore it. This is ideal but still does not mean that it is safe to leave the room when a real infant is resting in the swing. Refreshing and practicing obedience now goes a long way towards a smoother transition once baby arrives.

Have a plan for the situations such as the phone ringing. Here are some ideas.

1. Close the door to where the baby is.
2. Take dog with you.
3. Put a leash on your dog in the house to keep him near by or to use as a tether to furniture to safely secure him.
4. Use a baby gate that you must physically lock in place to gate off area when the baby is. (Not for those that like the high jump!)
5. Offer your dog some great outdoor activity in a secured area.

As always it is NEVER safe to leave a baby and dog unsupervised for any reason at any time.

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