

And baby makes... four

Help Rover make the transition from only dog to family dog

by Joan Orr and Teresa Lewin

A new baby on the way! It's a time of excitement and mixed emotions for your clients. Bringing that precious bundle home fills many parents with awe in recognizing the responsibility to protect this tiny being.

The family dog, once the "baby" of the family himself, frequently is perceived as a threat to the baby. An errant paw, a playful pounce, an overly affectionate greeting... all these previously innocuous behaviours are suddenly dangerous. Sometimes the family dog, displaced from the center of attention, growls at the baby or doesn't understand what this strange creature is and barks or otherwise acts in a way that terrifies parents.

There are plenty of things you can do to help parents-to-be prepare the dog in advance to help build a loving bond between dog and baby. Here are some exercises you can give clients who are expecting:

- Practise obedience from all positions – sitting on the couch, lying on the floor, etc.
- Acclimatize the dog to regular use of the crate for quiet time, even when people are home. Have owners drop treats into the crate as they pass
- Have your clients carry a doll around and practice with the doll using baby equipment; assess any behaviour



problems (pawing, for example) and eliminate existing behaviours that will not be acceptable later

- Practise impulse control and settling down while a doll is in a swing or other baby device where the dog may be able to reach the infant
- Put a dab of baby lotion or diaper cream (anything you may use on the baby) on the doll
- Walk with the stroller and encourage people to look in – reward the dog so he is happy when people look at the baby
- Vary the dog's routine – the baby may cause chaos to existing routines
- Associate happy emotions with baby sounds by playing a recording of baby noises while the dog is eating or being petted

· Accustom the dog to gradually decreased attention to the dog. He should have lots of exercise and more crate time so that he does not feel suddenly ignored

when the baby arrives

Even once baby comes, it can take months for a dog to realize that she's part of his family. Here are some things your clients can be doing once the baby has been born:

- Dad can bring home items with the baby's scent; let the dog sniff and give her treats and praise
- On the homecoming day, Dad or a friend can tire out the dog with a walk or play
- Dad can wait with the baby while Mum greets the dog; once the dog is settled (think Kong in the crate) then Dad can come in with the baby
- The crate should be positioned so that the dog can see the baby
- If all is calm, the dog can meet the baby; one parent holding

the leash and one holding the baby - lots of praise and treats; if the dog seems unsure – do some obedience exercises with treats at a comfortable distance to reassure the dog

· It may be best for the dog to observe the baby from a distance for a few days; once the dog is ignoring the baby, then he can be allowed to sniff her while one parent holds the baby and the other holds the leash and rewards the dog

· Use a baby monitor and keep the baby's door closed. Never, even for a moment, leave a dog and baby or toddler unsupervised together

Soon things will change again... the baby will learn to sit, to throw things, to drop food from the highchair, to crawl, to walk, to talk. The dog will notice all these changes, and his behaviour towards the baby may change as well. Parents can observe and anticipate, and most of all supervise, to ensure that the dog has positive experiences around the baby, is crated or leashed to avoid situations that could result in unwanted behaviour and gets lots of exercise. Thinking ahead and creating an environment where the dog has his best chance of engaging in appropriate behaviour will help to create and nurture a loving bond between dog and baby and lay the foundation for a lifetime of happy experiences.

image found on the web at www.kids-teens.org