

Enrolling your pet in a refresher training course can help reinforce positive behavior before the baby is born



Preparing Your Puppy for Baby

Tips for Introducing Your Katy Pet to Your New Cutie

Written by Natalie Cook Clark Select Photography by Marisa Hugonnett

Your baby is finally here and now everyone wants to welcome them into the world. Family and friends will line up when you arrive home from the hospital. There is one family member who should take priority in this greeting, though, even before the eager grandparents. “Dogs are pack members and they will want to welcome the newest member of their pack,” explains Dr. Alison Ivins of Bear Creek Animal Clinic. As parents stress about getting their home ready for the baby, it is also important to think about how you can best prepare your dog for the new arrival.

Train Your Furry Friend

My husband and I are expecting our first baby this summer and we have a 2-year-old German Shepherd-Rhodesian Ridgeback mix named Oscar whom we love dearly. When we first learned that we were expecting, we began to research and seek advice on how to prepare Oscar

for our growing family. One of the first things we did was put Oscar back in training. Since he is a large breed, he went through extensive training when he was younger.

Oscar is a well-trained dog, but when a baby is on the way, a refresher course can never hurt. Shannon Smith, a dog trainer with Rover Oaks explains, “A trained dog beforehand is much more clear on the expectations of its behavior around the baby.”

Consider Your Dog's Personality and Needs

Another step we took early on is to select baby products with Oscar in mind. Of course he is going to want to look in on our baby when she is asleep, so we selected a sturdy crib and we ruled out the idea of using a bassinet. Smith also stresses to make sure there is a distinct difference between the baby's toys and the dog's toys.

Since every dog is different, it is important to find the preparation methods that will work for your dog. We have had many conversations with Oscar's veterinarian. Oscar suffers from a seizure disorder, so it has been important for us to ensure that he is on the right medication and that we are introducing him gradually to new items coming into the house to reduce his stress and anxiety.

Slowly Introduce Puppy to Baby

We are not alone in our concerns for preparing our dog for our baby's arrival. Many Katy families have done the same. Sharie Kohler, a Katy mom, admits to being afraid to leave her baby alone with the dog. According to Dr. Ivins, this is a major concern and one that should be taken seriously. "No matter how much you love your dog, don't leave them alone with the baby," she advises.

When Kohler and her husband brought their now 7-year-old daughter, Catherine, home from the hospital, the first thing they did was let the dogs, a 1-year-old Lab and a 7-year-old Shetland Sheepdog, sniff the baby in the carrier. Of course, both parents were right there supervising the activity. "Put the dog in a work-mode behavior while they are around the baby," advises Smith of Rover Oaks. "Make them interact with the baby from a sitting or down position, reward them for good behavior, and over time gradually increase the time that they spend together."

"We did not ignore our dogs, so there [were] no jealousy issues associated with the baby," Kohler says. Trainers and veterinarians sometimes advise soon-to-be parents to gradually decrease the time they spend with their dog prior to the baby's arrival. It is best to take your dog's individual personality into consideration and decide what is best. "At first, we were more concerned with our younger Lab, Drake, and his high-energy level, but it really worked out well," says Kohler. "Catherine and our dog, Drake, grew up together and are still very close. The same thing held true when we brought our son, Luke, home."

Avoid Meal-Time Mayhem

Dogs can be a very positive experience for children and many dogs love being around kids. "One of the happiest times for a dog is when your child starts throwing food down from that high chair!" Dr. Ivins says. A common concern for parents is their dog's possessiveness over the food bowl. Early training prior to the baby's arrival can help ease any tension. When Mary Lindsey and her husband learned they were expecting, they immediately began reading dog training books and articles to prepare their Welch and Fox Terriers.

Preparation soon became even more important when they found out they were expecting twins after they already had one baby. "We taught our dogs that food was not sacred," Lindsey says. "We started small by petting them while they ate and worked up to where we could do anything to them while they ate." She even shares a story of the time she came into the room when her son was pulling on the dog's tongue. The dog wasn't doing anything about the child's torture, which showed Lindsey they did the right thing by desensitizing the dogs and preparing them for big changes.

Preparing for the Best

The family dog will be undergoing changes in its routine just like the parents will once the baby arrives. "This can be a happy time for your dog just as much as it is for you," says Dr. Ivins. "Always make sure that time with your baby is a happy time for the dog, where they can receive treats for demonstrating good behavior."

So as you stress about what car seat to buy or what nursery theme to use, also make sure that you are taking steps to prepare your dog for your family's newest addition. **KM**

NATALIE COOK CLARK is happy to be back in her hometown and loves her job as a freelance writer. She lives with her wonderful husband, Stephen, and dog, Oscar. They are expecting their first child in July.



5 Tips for Preparing Your Pet

With a little patience and a lot of love, you can count on your pet to become a loyal protector and eventually a loving playmate for your new Katy baby.

- 1 If you set up new boundaries or restrictions, establish these before baby arrives
- 2 Let dad carry baby in for the first time so you can greet your dog with open arms
- 3 Praise your dog when he is behaving around the baby to establish a positive, happy connection
- 4 Make time for your dog when baby naps or family members are helping with the baby
- 5 Have your dog take a refresher obedience course and offer lots of praise for good behavior

An advertisement for Waggin' Tails Pet Ranch. It features a close-up of a white dog's face on the left. The text reads: "WAGGIN' TAILS PET RANCH Where Pets Come to Play!". Below this, it lists services: "BOARDING * GROOMING * TRAINING * DAY-CAMP". Further down, it says: "An All-Inclusive Pet Resort on 15 Acres Just 6 Miles From Katy! Full-Sized In-Ground Pool Family Owned & Operated 24 Hour Monitoring". A phone number "281-533-0500" and address "7631 Katy-Fulshear Rd. Fulshear 77441" are provided. A sign graphic says "\$10 OFF Any Service When Mentioning This Ad". The website "www.WagginTailsPetRanch.com" is at the bottom. A small photo of the ranch building is also included.

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