

Q. If we're expecting a baby, do we need to give up our dog?

A. There are many different reasons why people surrender their family dog. One of the more common reasons is because they are expecting a new baby. There are many ways to help prepare your dog for the arrival of a new baby; in much the same way parents help children understand that a new brother or sister will be joining the family.

Remember, your dog was your first "baby" and is used to being the center of your attention. So it's understandable that he may experience "sibling" rivalry when you introduce a new human baby into your home.

When you first receive the wonderful news that you are expecting a baby, that is when you want to begin preparing your dog. Below is a general guide to follow. You will want to begin to work on these suggestions months before baby's arrival:

- Set up an appointment with your vet to ensure your dog is up to date on vaccines and speak with your vet about deworming.
- Have your pet spayed/neutered. The majority of dog bite incidents occur from intact males.
- Sign up your dog for a training class to refresh his basic commands and ask for help with behavior problems that may make you uncomfortable. Problems of concern may include fearfulness, anxiety, and aggression. If your dog exhibits any of these behaviors, you will need the help of a qualified trainer or animal behaviorist.
- Start to gradually accustom your dog to spending less time with you. Currently, your dog may be used to being the center of your attention. Don't wait until the baby comes, such a drastic change in attention can make your dog feel more stressed.
- If anyone in your home plays roughly with or likes to wrestle with your dog, they will need to change to a new type of play style. Dogs cannot discriminate...if they are allowed to jump on you or chew on your hands, they will assume it is okay to do that type of play with baby.
- Ask friends or relatives with small children or babies to visit your home and let your dog have positive interactions with them and become accustomed to their sounds and scents. Interactions must be supervised by an adult.
- Purchase a "baby sound" CD. These CDs are specially made to introduce dogs to new sounds such as a baby crying, giggling, etc.
- If your dog is currently allowed on the furniture, now is the time to work on keeping him on the floor. His jumping could easily tip over a baby chair or he

could accidentally jump directly on the child. Remember he is unable to discriminate between what he does with an adult and what he does with a baby.

- Start introducing baby items to your home, but do not allow him to jump on or play with these things. This is where his basic manners skills will come into play and is a good reason why he should be enrolled in a refresher course.
- Anytime you are working with your dog on the new rules, keep things positive and use a firm, low tone. You do not want him to develop a negative association with the new baby items, sounds, and scents.

Having a baby will definitely change your lifestyle and the lifestyle of your dog, but both of you can and will adjust. Try to maintain your dog's regular routine as much as possible. When baby is napping, spend some quality time with your dog, it will help relax you and make your dog feel special.

With some practice, patience, and a lot of love, all family members will adjust and be able to live happily together.

If you have specific questions regarding this subject, please call the Animal Refuge League and speak with our certified dog trainer.