

Introducing Your Child or Pet to the New Baby

Many expectant parents express concern over how their first-born child may respond to the arrival of a new baby.

How your child responds to a new sibling can vary widely and may depend in part on

- their age
- maturity
- personality
- expectations

Your pediatrician, books and websites may be useful resources to help you prepare your child for what can be a *big adjustment* in your family.

How can I prepare my child:

Most importantly, *keep your child INVOLVED and LISTEN to them*

- allow them to come to prenatal visits to hear the heartbeat and
- see the baby on ultrasound
- have them help prepare baby's room
- allow them to help pack your baby bag or pick out baby's home coming outfit.

- Discuss their own "babyhood"-highlight the *fun memories* and *milestones* which will both emphasize how fun new babies can be as well as demonstrate what a big kid your child has become.
- Talk about the baby, and allow your child to express their expectations as well as their concerns. Sometimes, *you can talk too much about the new baby so be sensitive to your child's reactions when discussing the baby.*
- Consider getting a baby doll for your little one to demonstrate how to hold and care for a baby.
- Prepare baby's room in advance and if moving your child from the crib to a toddler bed plan to do so months before baby's arrival so your child can get used to the new arrangement and not feel displaced by the new baby.
- Once the big day arrives be sure your child has adequate arrangement for care while you are at the hospital; don't let them feel abandoned.

- When your child comes to meet the new baby have another family member hold the baby or have the baby in the bassinet so *mom's arms and lap are available* for hugs just in case your child desires.
- Many families may have a birthday cake to celebrate.
- Consider having your child and baby exchange gifts –pick out something special for the baby to give and let your older child pick out the gift he or she wants to give to the baby.
- And ultimately, be sure to give your older child adequate one-on-one attention and quality time to let them know that your love for them is not diminished by the arrival of a sibling.

The baby and our beloved pet:

Likewise, many couples expecting their first child may have concerns over how their pets may respond to new baby.

- Not only do we worry about the *stress this may cause a pet*, but also we want to be sure *baby stays safe*.
- Start preparing your pet for baby's arrival months in advance of your due date to ensure smooth transition.



NOTE For cat-owners it is important to be aware of toxoplasmosis, a rare parasitic disease that can cause serious birth defects or miscarriage if contracted during pregnancy. The parasite lives in the gut of cats and is shed in cat feces, so we encourage pregnant women to avoid cat feces.

- This doesn't mean you have to get rid of your beloved cat-it is highly *unlikely* that you will get the disease from your pet.
- Instead, we encourage you to avoid handling any cat feces especially that of an unfamiliar cat and have a non-pregnant loved-one take over litter box cleaning duty.

How to prepare your pet: First, make sure your pet is healthy!

- Be sure your pet has had a *recent routine exam*, and is up to date on all *vaccinations*.
- Make certain their *nails are well-trimmed* and consider de-clawing your cat if this has not yet been done.
- Be sure to have you pet spayed or neutered-this makes pets calmer and less likely to bite.

- Address any *behavioral problems* (such as nipping or biting, swatting or jumping) – consider enrolling in pet-training classes or getting an expert to help train your pet to get rid of any undesirable behaviors.
- Introduce your pet to the sounds and smells of a baby before you bring baby home – invite a friend with a baby to come visit, or play recordings of baby crying.
- Allow your pet to wander in baby’s new room unless you plan to exclude your pet in which case install a proper barrier prior to baby’s arrival to train your pet to stay out.
- Once the baby arrives bring home a messy receiving blanket or piece of clothing with your *newborn baby’s smell* for your pet to investigate while mom is recovering in the hospital. (The percentage of the dog's brain that is devoted to analyzing smells is actually 40 times larger than that of a human! It's been estimated that dogs can identify smells somewhere between 1,000 to 10,000 times better than nasally challenged humans)
- *Reward desirable behaviors* with treats and be sure to spend plenty of quality time playing with, walking and comforting your pet.
- When you bring baby home introduce your pet to the baby and allow them to sit next to you while holding the baby. Don’t force them to greet the baby if they are frightened or disinterested.
- Let them know you haven’t forgotten about them by sticking to your normal pet care *routine!*
- Always *supervise* your pets when they are interacting with the baby to ensure safe interactions.