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DOGS AND BABIES

Before you can begin teaching your dog to be happy with a new addition in the house, you will need to form a good relationship with your dog. Most people tend to treat their dog as they would a baby, and unfortunately, dogs do not understand this relationship and will quickly take advantage of you. Hopefully, you are able to implement the suggestions in this handout before your new child is born.

First, get into a routine of being the leader in the household. Make your dog earn everything that he values, from food to affection. If your dog misbehaves, yelling or physically correcting him/her will be counterproductive. Remember, when you correct a dog you must ALWAYS tell him/her what he/she should have done. (For example: If your dog jumps up, tell the pet "Off" and then "Sit." If your pet greets people in a "Sit" every time, you will have a much more manageable pet.

Next, teach your pet the basic commands of "Sit," "Down," and "Stay." You cannot control your dog unless he/she understands what you want.

Expose your dog to babies or baby sounds on a regular basis, before your child is born. This way your pet will be accustomed to the sounds and smells that come with babies. It is helpful to obtain a recording of a baby crying, cooing, and talking. Also adjust the volume of these noises now and then.

When you are playing the tape, practice "Sit," "Down," and "Come." Your dog will then know if you say "Sit," he/she needs to respond amid distractions. If the baby is crying, call the dog and together go to the baby. Another good idea is to have a dish of dog treats on the changing table. As you change the baby, tell your dog to "Sit" or "Down" and reward with a treat. This builds a nicer relationship in the dog's mind that when the baby is around, he/she gets good stuff (treats).

When the baby is still in the hospital, bring home a blanket or something with his/her scent on it. Show it to the dog and say the baby's name in a happy tone. Praise your pet. Do not play tug-of-war with the blanket...this would lead to undesirable behaviors.

The day that mom and baby come home, have dad carry the baby in, so that mom is free to love on the dog (alot). After greetings are done, slowly bring your dog to see the baby. If you are concerned with jumping, leave the collar and leash on the pet. If the dog has learned Stay, the leash and collar may not be needed. But always keep in mind that safety comes first!

Whenever the baby is in the room, be sure to give the dog extra attention. The idea is to have the dog associate praise and affection (attention) with the presence of the baby. Be sure the baby is safe at all times in a playpen, highchair, etc. Never leave a baby alone or in a vulnerable position with the dog. Your dog may get agitated when the baby cries and as a result will become more animated. Watch your dog and

KIDS AND PETS

Pets as Children

To many owners, pets can symbolize children. They depend on us for attention, social direction, food and shelter, or care when they are injured or ill. Acquiring a cat or dog is often one of the first joint decisions made by new life-partners and the first focus of shared responsibility.

Young couples frequently experiment with "parenting" a pet before having children. When the real children arrive, however, pet owners may suddenly be reminded that pets are animals, after all.

Introducing Your Pet to a New Baby

The first rule of introducing your dog or cat to a new baby is that it must be a gradual process. Pets, especially dogs, need time to adjust to a new family member. When you learn a child is on the way, review basic obedience skills daily with your dog so that it will reliably and consistently obey you. The commands to "sit/stay" and "down/stay" are essential to control your dog and give direction for desirable behavior.

A curious and affectionate pet can unintentionally harm a baby. A child may be accidentally scratched or even dropped when a friendly dog jumps up on you to investigate. Keep your pet's nails well trimmed. If your pet has any type of behavior problem, resolve it now while your life is still relatively uncomplicated.

In anticipation of a baby's arrival, take preventive measures. If you are aware of even the smallest problems with your pet, these are best resolved before the baby comes. Pre-existing behavior problems are often magnified with time, especially as seen through the eyes of a sleep-deprived new parent! New parents who are thinking of obtaining a pet soon after a baby's birth should carefully consider the additional investment of time and energy required and deserved by any pet. If you have any doubts, don't adopt a pet until later.

When the baby comes home from the hospital, it is probably best to isolate him or her from your pet for the first few days. To minimize excitement, greet your pet calmly without the baby there. Though new parents are often tired, you should make extra effort to spend "quality" time with your faithful pet.

Reserve positive interaction between you and your pet to times for when the baby is present, minimizing attention at all other times. In this way, your dog is unlikely to view the baby's presence negatively, which could result from reduced owner attention. Some of the following suggestions may be initiated even before your baby arrives home.

Present a blanket with the baby's scent to your pet. Let the pet explore this new odor under positive circumstances. Reward your pet with gentle words and caresses so that it forms a positive association with the baby even before they are introduced. If your pet has a

special place to sleep, place the baby's blanket there.

It may help to carry a doll as an imaginary baby and to pretend to do chores, such as diaper changes, associated with baby care. This mimics the changes that will be part of your lives. Teach your pet to hold a "sit/stay" position in the presence of the doll. Allow your dog to investigate the doll only if the animal remains calm and controlled.

Make a tape recording of your crying infant and play this at gradually increased volume while you practice obedience commands and praise your pet for desirable behavior. When your dog is undisturbed by the recording, continue training sessions with the tape recording and doll. By the time you introduce your baby to the dog, your pet will be more likely to adhere to basic training despite its curiosity.

When you are ready to introduce the dog and baby, have an adult hold the pet on a short leash in a controlled "sit/stay" or "down/stay" position across the room, while another adult holds the baby. Proceed slowly over several days, bringing the dog (as long as it is well-behaved) closer to the baby. Keep the dog under control with a reassuring and relaxed manner. After several weeks of consistently successful sessions, cautiously allow your dog off its leash. No matter how well you trust your pet, an infant should not be left alone with any animal.

If your pet has a history of guarding its food, hunting for small prey, escaping to roam free, resisting obedience training, undisciplined or wild behavior toward people, excessive fear in new situations or with strangers, or aggression toward you or anyone else, you must proceed with extreme caution (or perhaps not at all).

If you have any reason to suspect that your dog may harm the baby, a muzzle is a wise precaution during training. While some dog breeds are more likely to attack children, a dog of any breed can injure your child under certain circumstances.

If you are not certain that your pet is trustworthy (because of its history or your lack of time, skill or commitment in training it), your child's safety must come first. Do not allow your child, or your dog, to become a statistic. Hire babysitters that have experience with pets, and carefully instruct them on keeping child and dog separate.

During visits with friends who have pets, in your home or in theirs, do not let your guard down. Infants should be closely supervised at all times, even with the most trusted pets. No one, especially children of any age, should be left unattended with an animal they cannot control.

Keep soiled diapers in a "pet-proof" hamper. Dogs may be tempted to investigate and even eat soiled diapers. This normal parental behavior in adult dogs is directed toward keeping their den area clean. Their purpose is to keep their offspring (your newborn) healthy and safe from predators that might otherwise detect their odors.

Dogs and cats may urinate or defecate on baby blankets or baby clothes, or on your bed. Some cats may urinate or defecate in a

newborn's crib. These are not acts of malice or jealousy. Territorial marking relieves a pet's anxiety, covering the baby's scent (or yours) with its own. Do not scold your pet for this behavior, as this will only increase its stress during adjustment to new circumstances. Prevent access to its targets and spend more time with the pet.

Training Your Pet to Tolerate Children

Problems between a pet and a child begin at the toddler stage. When the baby learns to crawl and then to walk, it enters a new phase, and your pet's view of the child may change. A dog with a strong instinct to hunt small creatures may not immediately recognize this new, ground-level moving target as the same baby that days earlier was carried from place to place. Predatory behavior may be awakened in pet dogs that have never displayed any interest in hunting or any intolerance of your child.

Many dogs and cats fear small children. Rather than approaching a baby, they are more likely to run away from it. Parents should be watchful when the baby begins crawling and walking. Keep your dog by your side in a "sit/stay" position while the baby moves about. Reward its controlled response with caresses and calm words of praise.

A toddler is less likely to be intentionally injured by a cat (unless the cat was defending itself), perhaps because a domestic cat's predatory instincts are triggered by much smaller prey.

Even gentle cats and dogs can be provoked by toddlers and young children. When your baby becomes a toddler, take time to reassure your pet during supervised interaction. Remain watchful and teach your child to respect your pet. More often than not, you will need to protect your pet from your child.

Training Your Child To Be "Pet Wise"

A child should be taught to interact appropriately with pets from the time s/he begins to crawl and walk. From the moment they begin to crawl, children investigate everything around them, including your pet. Your pet's toys, food or water bowl and a cat's litter box are fair targets.

To your pet's misfortune, young children have no perception of the pain they can inflict by biting, stepping or jumping on, kicking, squeezing, hitting, pinching, twisting or pulling various parts of your pet's body. A child may lift and toss a pet that is light enough, and not fast enough to avoid it. Many children delight in waking a sleeping pet by screaming in its ear or persistently chasing it, giving it no peace. Your children's friends should also be monitored when your pet is nearby.

Under adult supervision, children must be taught how to treat pets. Children must learn that pets are not toys and are living beings that feel pain. It is not enough to tell them what not to do. Children must be taught to substitute unacceptable behavior with acceptable behavior toward your pet.

Children must be shown which parts of a pet's body can be touched and how to gently pet them. Teach them not to disturb an animal while it is resting or sleeping, eating a meal, or playing with or chewing on a favorite toy or object. Teach your child not to pursue a pet that runs away from them. Teach them not to restrain a pet that is trying to break free. A child must be made to understand its own physical strength and the consequences of its behavior.

In some cases, role playing is helpful. A child can pretend to be a dog or cat while an adult mimics the child. If your child is uncooperative, it may be best to keep pet and child separated until the child demonstrates more maturity and self-control. It may be necessary, and indeed humane, to place your pet temporarily or permanently in another home.

No pet should be made to suffer unnecessarily. Every pet has limits to its own tolerance and even the kindest, most reliably patient animal has a breaking point. It is unfair to everyone to allow your child to continually harass a beloved pet.

Reasons for Adopting a Pet

Parents who are considering acquiring a pet to teach their preadolescent or adolescent child to be responsible should reconsider their motivation. Your expectations must be realistic. More often than not, pet care falls on the parents' shoulders.

Some adults consider it educational for their child to watch pets mate, become pregnant and deliver a litter. Parents who want to teach a child to be responsible should have pets neutered before sexual maturity. Your child can learn about reproduction from other appropriate resources.