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***Mistakes made before a new human baby arrives.***

*Dr. Karen Shaw Becker*

Story at-a-glance.

It's wise to get your dogs accustomed to occasional changes even before a new baby arrives in the household;

It goes without saying, however, that you must stay attuned to your dog's basic needs, such as meal times and potty breaks.

Getting your dog used to the smells associated with the new baby.

As well as some of the schedule changes before the infant actually arrives will take a lot of the surprise out of the equation.

One way dog owners might think they should prepare for a new baby's arrival is to pay more attention to the animal than normal beforehand to make up for possible lack of attention later, but that's the opposite approach you should take.

A change in schedules is often one of the first impacts to the status quo when a new baby arrives, but changing it up here and there prior to the baby's due date can help get your dog (or cat) used to slight or occasional modifications.

Everyone loves babies, and (nearly) every member of a household looks forward with anticipation to the arrival of a new little bundle of joy coming home for the first time.

There's the nursery to prepare, diapers to purchase, baby-proofing to think about and many other things.

Children are often the first to be taken into account when the star of the "blessed event" is getting ready to cross the threshold.

Even the youngest are perceptive enough to comprehend that change is going to come & not everybody's sure what that's going to look like. If you're expecting such a transition in your household, there surly be another entity to consider: your dog or other pets.

Whether you have a dog, a cat or both, you probably already know they, too, can sense that in some way or other, the balance of power is getting ready to shift.

**According to Fox News:**

*"Although cats and dogs likely can sense change well before your little one is born, pet experts say taking small steps four to six months before delivery, like changing your dog's walking schedule, can help make for a smoother transition."<sup>1</sup>*

If you've ever been on the receiving end of a new baby's arrival into the household, you already know that keeping things on an even keel, so to speak, often involves changes (and not only when it comes to diapers). Luckily, there are things you can do to remove potential pitfalls for humans and four-legged friends alike.

**Schedules:** Expect changes and help pets to be able to roll with them. Call it a practice run, if you'd like, but there's nothing wrong with tweaking things a bit beforehand if it might make a baby's appearance easier for your dog.

The idea is not to throw them off their schedule but to get them accustomed to occasional changes.

It goes without saying, however, that you must stay attuned to your dog's basic needs, always providing food, interaction, toilet breaks and litter or box cleaning.

One of the first impacts to the status quo often involves schedules.

For instance, if the first thing your dog expects in the morning is a brisk, early walk, it may not happen like clockwork as it once did.

But something as simple as changing it up here and there several months prior to the baby's due date can help get your dog (or cat) used to slight or occasional modifications.

Of course, it has to fit your lifestyle, but dogs can become as ingrained as anybody to have expectations.

When they're used to their favorite things, such as meals, treats, play and outdoor excursions practically programmed by the minute, some can be upset by a switch-up.

Schedules can be helpful; just don't let them rule your life.

As an example, if a walk is something your dog looks forward to first thing in the morning and again just before bed, you might start the process with the expected morning stroll.

Then, take them out for a late-afternoon spin instead of waiting until early evening (if that's the usual drill).

A few days later, you could shorten the early morning walk, then take your dog out for another quick trot to the mailbox and out just before leaving for work.

Practical preparations to ready your dog.

Getting your dog used to things they're not used to is one way you can help make your pets more accepting of a new little person in the house. Advises in this regard - If you do not want the dog and cat to go into the nursery, start training them to stay out of the room before the baby arrives — and yes, cats are trainable too."<sup>2</sup>

Items like the crib, toys and a new rocker may be a curiosity to some pets, but out-of-the ordinary noises like a crying baby or even the squeak of baby toys may send your dog into a panic.

**Parents.com** contends that dog who are only used to two adults in the house are the ones who have the hardest time adjusting:

*"Cats and dogs are also sensitive to newborns' cries, so you might gradually get them accustomed to the sound by playing a recording (tape a friend's baby or buy a CD ... [online]).*

*Invite friends with children to come over more often to get your dog further adjusted to life with kids.*

*It's important to socialize a cat or dog well beforehand."*<sup>3</sup>

In addition, dogs, especially, are super-aware of smells.

In fact, scientists say dogs smell thousands of times more smells than humans can and have about 50 smell receptors while humans only have one.

There are ways to use that as a preparation mode.

Advises in this regard > that you allow your dog to get familiar with baby toys, blankets and other items, and hear them, as well.

Your cat or dog will already be familiar with the baby's smell the moment your newborn arrives home.<sup>4</sup>

### **New habits going on around here.**

Rather than being concerned that the baby will make your dog feel left out or neglected, you might instead be concerned that habits your dog has may be an unwelcome reality for the baby.

[Excessive barking](#) is one example. Whether it's a puppy or an adult dog, barking just when the baby has fallen asleep can cause problems. Needless to say, this is something that needs to be nipped in the bud; best-case scenario, months before the arrival of the new baby coming home.

The process takes time, but the key is not to punish the behavior — especially as its natural — but to reward silence.

There are different reasons for barking, and changes necessary for your dog or cat may be wise to make before anything else.

One way pet owners think they should [prepare for a new baby's arrival](#) is to pay more attention to the animal than normal beforehand to make up for possible lack of attention later, but that's the opposite approach you should take, Parents.com says:

*"Lavishing a pet with attention during your pregnancy may be well intentioned, but it's actually not the best idea.*

*If your pet is used to being the center of your universe, back off a bit before the baby is born.*

*That gives your pet the opportunity to become more independent.*<sup>5</sup>

### **Preventing problems before they occur.**

What's true for children and even adults when a new baby makes the transition into a household for the first time is that everybody wants to see the new little him or her.

That's also true for pets.

You may find them craning their necks to see what that little wiggling, blanket-wrapped bundle is.

But sometimes, they'll want to jump up and get up close and personal.

Here's a great idea:

*"While you obviously can't warn them of what's ahead, you can start, during pregnancy, to desensitize pets to life with an infant.*

*You may have heard that it's a good idea to carry around a baby doll —*

*it may seem silly, but it gets a dog used to seeing you with a bundle in your arms or on your lap.*

*You need to teach a dog, particularly, not to jump on you when you have the doll.*

*If a dog doesn't respond to verbal commands, such as 'sit' or 'down,' we suggest you start obedience training well before your baby's birth."<sup>6</sup>*

**Veterinarians weigh in on specifics for getting your dog ready for a new baby, but baby doctors have a few things to say, as well.**

*Katie Friedman, a pediatrician, cautions parents to never leave dogs completely alone with babies, no matter how well-trained they are or how trustworthy they've been in the past.*

While no one wants to think of such a scenario, the Boy Scout model of preparation is a good rule of thumb.

Friedman says dogs in particular are less likely to attack a child if an adult is around.

Instead of leaving your dog in close proximity to small children to get acquainted, you can help with the process.

She adds, "You need to see how they respond to the baby before they can get too close to your infant.

Bring them into the same room to see what their reaction is."<sup>7</sup>