



FEATURE

How to introduce a new family member to your dog



Most people who have dogs will agree that a dog is basically a family member. They show you just as much love and affection, arguably more in a lot of cases, as your parents, your siblings or your own children, and they become such an integral part of your house.

As much as you look forward to coming home and hanging out with your family, you also look forward to the fact that there is also a dog there that's been waiting for this moment of daily reunion since you left that morning.

So with that in mind, consider the fact that a family becomes dysfunctional when there's tension and a lack of communication. When two members don't get along, when they are unwilling to try and work out their problems.

For the most part, that's not a terribly common problem with dogs because, of course, communication between two humans is very different to communication between a human and an animal. But issues can still arise if one of your family members is unfamiliar with how to treat a dog, or how to live alongside one. And these issues will be most likely to occur at the earliest stage, when a new family member arrives, especially since dogs are naturally protective and territorial and will be wary of something new and could very well become aggressive.

The most likely scenario here is the introduction of a newborn, so therefore it's very important to ensure that you take the correct measures when introducing this new family addition to your dog. Here's a few steps you must take:

Lower Your Dog's Expectations

This one sounds pretty harsh, but it's actually not quite as bad as it seems. This is simply about ensuring that your dog is aware of the fact that the amount of attention they get is going to be lessening.

Chances are your dog is getting a lot of love and affection, but when a new baby comes along, you aren't going to have anywhere near enough time to dedicate to that. Being a parent is basically a full-time job.

Your baby will need constant care and it's not uncommon that a dog will get jealous and potentially aggressive because of it, if they cease to get the level of attention that they had before.

So to prevent this, you need to gradually lower the amount of attention you're giving to your dog before the baby arrives. Don't take away your love, just let your dog get used to longer periods of time without constant focus. It will be tough for both you and your dog but it's a necessary process and it will allow your dog a much smoother transition.

Introduce Scents

This is another method that's been tried and tested and is proven to be very successful. It's no secret that dogs have a very keen sense of smell. And their sense of smell is often very informative in their behaviour.

What this means is that if there is an unfamiliar scene in their territory it can often be cause for alarm for them. They know the smells of their family and any other common scents that are found in their home.

A new family member will come with a whole bunch of new scents. Primarily things like baby powder, formula and other new products that you'll be using. So it's a good idea to make these smells known beforehand.

Maybe rub some baby powder into your own skin so that when your dog is around you, they'll start to notice that something is changing and they'll have time to get used to it. It won't be as much of a shock to their system when the newcomer actually arrives.

Supervise Interactions

You absolutely cannot leave a new baby alone with a dog, nor can you keep your baby in a position where the dog can get too close to them. This means that you must have barriers to protect your baby.

Barricade off their sleeping area, where they play and make sure that these barricades are completely dog-proof. Eventually this can change, but you must make sure, at first, that while your dog can see, hear and smell the baby, they can't get close enough to do harm.

This is not to say that every single dog will have a natural inclination to attack something they're unfamiliar with, but they are territorial creatures whose intellect is vastly inferior to ours at the end of the day, and no matter how domesticated they are, you can never be sure.

Spend the first several months monitoring the situation until you are comfortable in the knowledge that your dog and your baby are familiar with each other.

Keep the Environment Safe for Your Baby

This ties into the other points of course, but the gist of what I'm saying here is that there are some extra measures you might need to take in terms of keeping the place clean. You might not personally mind having dog hair everywhere, but it won't be good for a child.

Wash your dog regularly and also keep the floors and the furniture clean, because your baby is going to be spending a lot of time there. This means investing in a good vacuum cleaner to get rid of all that pesky dog hair.

In all likelihood, as your baby grows they will love your dog just as much as you do and your family dynamic should remain as healthy and stable as it always has been. But you need to get over the hurdle of the initial meeting first, and by following these steps that shouldn't be a difficult process.

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Joseph was born in Alberta, raised in NYC and is living in New Zealand. He has been working in 4 different industries and helped numerous businesses grow. Now, he is focused on writing as his next career from home and lives a peaceful life with his family and a whole pack of dogs.

