



Children and Pets

Children and pets are a great combination and can be wonderful and loving companions. To make sure that your children and your pets always get along well and are safe, it is important to prepare for new arrivals (pet or child) and to teach children how to properly behave with pets.

NEW BABY AND YOUR PETS

A new baby means that there will be new sights, sounds and smells in your home, and that daily routines are likely to change. These changes may make some dogs and cats feel nervous or insecure. However, if you plan ahead, you can make the arrival of a new baby a smooth and stress-free transition for your pet. Here are a few tips:

- ✓ **Prepare beforehand:** When you have the baby's nursery prepared, allow your pet to inspect it, with your supervision. Begin using the room, allowing your pet to spend time in the room with you. Close the door (or install a baby gate) to prevent your dog or cat from entering the room uninvited. This helps to establish necessary boundaries before the baby arrives. (With dogs, it is helpful to train a "wait" command, which will allow you to control your dog's access to the room). When the baby has been born, ask your spouse or a familiar relative to take a piece of baby clothing or a baby blanket home for your pet to smell.
- ✓ **Baby's homecoming:** Keep your baby's homecoming a quiet event. Throwing a party or immediately inviting guests may cause your pet to become more nervous and excitable. Have dad or a familiar relative carry the baby in so that mom can greet your pet(s). Introduce your new baby, once your pet has settled down and is relaxed. Keep the first meeting brief and calm, maintaining a comfortable distance between the baby and your pet. Allow your pet to decide how

closely he approaches the baby. If he is excited, take care to prevent direct contact that could scratch or frighten the baby. It can be helpful to have one family member hold the pet (on lead for dogs), while another holds the baby. This provides control and also allows the person holding the pet to positively reinforce calm behaviors.

- ✓ **Designate quality time:** It is a good idea to spend some special quiet time alone with your pet each day, when the baby has settled in for a nap. This time can involve simply sitting together for petting, playing a favorite game, or going for a short walk.
- ✓ **Keep it safe:** No matter how well the relationship seems to be progressing, never leave your baby and pet together unsupervised. Even the most friendly and gentle pet can inadvertently cause injury to a baby or toddler. Regardless of how much you trust your pet to behave appropriately with your baby, err on the side of caution and never leave your baby or young child unattended with a pet.





PETS AND CHILDREN

Bringing home a new pet is similar to bringing home a baby. Set up a quiet place for your new dog or cat and establish boundaries for interaction between your new dog or cat and your children. Here are a few helpful tips to ensure that children and pets become good companions for each other:

- ✓ ***Pets and babies:*** As stated previously, all interactions between babies and pets should be supervised. This is especially important with a young pet or with a new pet who may have had little training or exposure to babies.
- ✓ ***Toddlers:*** Toddlers are usually very interested in the pets of the house and are now able to approach pets by crawling or walking. However, the sudden movements and high-pitched noises of small children can cause pets to become nervous or excited. Therefore, it is still essential that interactions between pets and toddlers are carefully supervised. This is an ideal age to begin to teach children about gentle handling, and respectful care of pets. Select age-appropriate books about pets to read to your child. Model good behavior by demonstrating how to pet and speak kindly to your dog or cat in ways that you know your pet enjoys.
- ✓ ***Teach gentleness and respect:*** Once your children are past the toddler stage, they are old enough to learn how to behave with animals. Children must be taught (it does not come naturally to them) to approach dogs and cats calmly and quietly, to pet gently and appropriately, and to speak softly and kindly. Rules also include that children must never hit, tease, pull tails, lie upon, or attempt to ride a pet. With dogs especially, it is important that children are taught to never disturb or interfere with a dog who is eating, sleeping, or is chewing on a bone or toy.

- ✓ ***Share the care:*** Many children enjoy being responsible for part of their pet's daily care. This can include feeding, walking, grooming and training. Enlisting your child's help not only teaches responsibility, but also helps to build a strong bond of love between your child and your pet.

