

Vet Group Offers Tips on Introducing Dog to Baby

American Veterinary Medical Association provides the do's and don'ts of making it work.

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When Sparky and Junior meet for the first time, it's a good idea for the new parents to be vigilant. The American Veterinary Medical Association offers safety tips for a smooth introduction between dog and baby.

Dr. Bonnie Beaver, former AVMA president and professor at Texas A&M College of Veterinary Medicine, says that before a newborn arrives in the home, the family dog needs to adjust to not being the center of attention anymore. "Begin training the dog to observe a schedule – treats at a certain time of day, walks at a certain time of day," she says.

That's because when mom gets home with the baby, her attention will shift, so the dog won't get attention on demand anymore, she says. Other tips for new parents include the following:

Do set up a meeting with a friend's children. Plan a play date with somebody else's child, the AVMA says. Keep the dog on a leash. If the dog is scared or aggressive, talk to your veterinarian and use great caution.

Do include the dog when baby arrives. Let the dog greet the new mom, who has been missed while she was at the hospital, and then sniff the baby, too. Keep the dog on a leash or just allow him to sniff a used baby blanket.

Do use baby gates. When a child starts crawling and walking, Dr. Beaver says baby gates can be useful in keeping the dog and the baby safe. This also prevents the possibility of a child cornering the pet, which might cause the dog to nip.

Don't ban the dog from baby's room. Once the baby is home, dog and baby shouldn't live separate lives. However, never leave them together unsupervised, the AVMA says.

Children are the most common victims of dog bites, according to the AVMA. Children are vulnerable to dog bites because of their size and their inexperience with animals, therefore, the two need to interact in a safe manner, Dr. Beaver says. For example, when bathing the baby, give the dog a treat so he learns that good things happen when he's around the baby.

"When a baby cries, it can be extremely disturbing and upsetting to the dog. If the dog is pacing, the dog is saying, 'make it be quiet.' It's not saying, 'I'm concerned about the baby,'" she says. "The dog is in distress, and if you ignore the upsetting situation, the screeching, the dog might act on its own to stop the noise."