

## Oh, Baby!

### **Help your dog adjust to a new family member.**

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The test came back positive, the nursery is decorated, and you're a pro at parenting class. Soon you'll hear the pitter-patter of little feet. You're ready!

But what about your canine family member? Is she ready?

Each year, unprepared owners relinquish scores of dogs to shelters or rescue groups when a new baby arrives. According to Stephanie Shain, director of outreach for the Humane Society of the United States, many people begin dog-meets-baby planning too late, if at all. To avoid problems and canine-human sibling rivalry, begin preparing your dog well in advance of the baby's homecoming—ideally months before. During the actual homecoming is probably too late. This is a high-stress time for new parents, filled with emotions, challenges, and uneven routines. The dog picks up on this and might act out unexpectedly, especially if she feels neglected.

They associate your lack of attention with the baby, Shain says. But, you don't want to give any cause to associate the baby with anything negative. You may unconsciously do just that when you snap at your dog for smelling the infant, push her away, or scold her for doing things that you once condoned, such as entering the guest room which is now the nursery. Jennifer Shryock, a canine behavior consultant and creator of the Dogs and Storks program (which helps pet owners prepare for a new baby), based in Cary, N.C., says a big mistake is not recognizing the dog's attention-seeking behaviors and curbing them early on. Something that's annoying now, such as pawing, can become downright obnoxious, if not dangerous, once baby is on board.

You can minimize negative effects during this transitional time by following a few guidelines:

1. Starting months before the baby arrives, take your dog to obedience school, even if she's attended before. This serves as a teaching tool for her and a bonding opportunity for both of you.
2. Have friends with infants and small children visit and watch how your dog reacts. If she seems afraid, don't force any interaction, but let her approach at her own pace. Learn how to read her body language. Consult a trainer or behaviorist if her anxiety appears excessive. Remember: Never leave dogs and children unsupervised.