

Introducing New Changes to Your Dog

Preparing your dog for upheaval makes for a smooth transition.

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Whether it's a new baby, spouse, pet, a move or a loss, change adds stress to a dog's life, much as it adds tension to ours.

The best time to help your dog with a change is before it happens, said Wayne Hunthausen, DVM, an animal behavior consultant and recent past president of the American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior.

"Anticipate how your pet might respond and take steps to prevent anxiety and behavior problems that might occur," said Dr. Hunthausen, who is based in Westwood, Kansas. "If you know from the past there was some change and the dog was anxious, take steps to relieve the anxiety."

One way to help an edgy animal is to ease into the change.

If it will be a new baby, there's plenty of time to make the transition. Depending on who has always walked the dog, start shifting that responsibility to a professional dog walker or sharing it with your spouse. Your pet needs to know it has someone to rely on.

If your dog has had no exposure to children, make a tape of a baby crying, slowly raising the volume so it can get used to the new sounds. Carry a package in your arms and teach the dog not to jump, at least while you are cradling something in your arms. Doing this while both of you are relaxed will save a lot of shrieking when the baby finally comes home. Likewise, set up the nursery early, so the dog can get used to the new smells, such as baby lotion and powder, and introduce those aromas at a time connected with fun, like on a walk.

Although many changes come with a baby, Robert Anderson, an animal behaviorist in Minneapolis, Minnesota, said most calls he gets deal with children between 6 months and 2 years old enough to chase a dog or pull its tail.

A new baby isn't the only stranger who can play havoc with a dog's psyche. A new significant other or spouse can affect your pet.

When Linda Newman of Hopkins, Minnesota, started spending more time with her boyfriend in her home, one of her three Australian Shepherds, Shadow, protested by constantly barking at him, especially when he sat on the couch, where the dogs have a section reserved for them.

"A trainer suggested spending special time with (Shadow) and giving him another special place on the couch," Newman said. The excessive barking stopped after two months.