

Baby On Board

For this edition of the Obedience Corner, we're going to discuss an issue that many families face, "We are having a baby. What do we do with our dog to make things go well?" A baby coming home will be a big change for your dog and that's obvious. What is less obvious is knowing the things you should keep the same:

- Do your best to keep the dog's routines consistent. If you need to change the routines, change them gradually before the baby comes home. Your dog's routines include:
 - a. Feeding time and location
 - b. Playtime
 - c. Sleeping areas and sleep time (includes naps)
 - d. Toys
 - e. Level of Attention
- Do not change the "dog rules" of the house for better or worse. Keep your relationship with your dog the same. Don't be overly strict or demanding nor allow the dog extra "benefit of the doubt". Keep the boundaries the same. Dogs may become demanding if they are babied.

Things that should change:

- Trust. No dog or small child is completely trustworthy around each other. Dogs should not be allowed free access to any small child. Accidents can happen too fast to leave it to chance. If the baby is on the floor or even on your lap with a dog in the room, the dog should be on a leash or under your "control". When the dog is being polite around you and the baby, calmly praise and reward. If the dog becomes rough or too excited, say "nope", get up and leave the dog or put the dog outside or in another room. This should remain a house rule until past toddler age.
- The floor. The floor is the dog's world. That's where they sleep, eat, play, etc. If you want to be on the floor with the baby, do not expect the dog to be any different than how he was before the baby came. If you want to be on the floor with the baby, think about another room so you can focus on each other. This becomes super important when the baby becomes mobile.
- Control. Work on basic obedience commands with your dog BEFORE you need your dog to listen to you. The basic commands (sit, down, stay) should be positive and fun and not a command you use because the dog has done something wrong. After they've learned the basic commands, practice them when there are different distractions, especially children.
- Socialization. Expose your dogs to babies if you have any understanding friends that are willing to visit. Allow the dogs to hear a baby cry. Allow the dogs to smell baby powder, oil, baby toys, (and dirty diapers). Do not buy expensive

baby toys. Dogs will not have the ability to distinguish between a dog toy left for them and a baby toy accidentally on the floor.

These are a set of guidelines that you should be aware of before the stork arrives at your door. Every family and household is different and some things are more important than others. The thing to keep in mind is that your dog will need some training before the baby arrives and structure and leadership after the baby arrives. Good luck and happy training.