



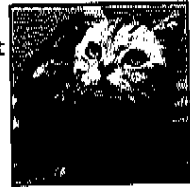
Helping Your Cat and New Baby Get Along

By: Cal Orey

Your Cat and Your New Baby

A crying baby can get on anyone's nerves so imagine what it's like for a cat who is used to ruling the roost alone. If you are bringing home a bundle of joy, there are steps you can take to create a lasting friendship between your cat and your infant.

Don't
leave
the cat
alone
with
your
baby.



Start Before Your Baby is Born

Try to get your cat used to the forthcoming environmental perturbations as far in advance of the baby's arrival as possible. For example, put baby powder and lotion on your own skin before you play with your cat so that she can get used to the smell. If your friends have babies, have them record their babies cries and play the recording at home for your cat, starting softly and gradually increasing the volume. "It'll help desensitize your cat to the new sound," explains New York City-based veterinarian Dr. Peter Kross.

Ask your friends to bring their children over for short visits to get your kitty used to scampering feet, but supervise the children closely so that they don't make any sudden moves or grabs for the cat. After the baby is born, bring a blanket home from the hospital that has baby's scent on it and leave it around the house for your pet to sniff.

You should also visit the veterinarian with your cat. Take Kitty in for a clean bill of health. Make sure she is free of fleas, tapeworms, ticks, etc., and update necessary vaccinations to make sure nothing can be passed on to your baby.

When the New Baby Arrives

- Make introductions. Sit with the baby in a comfortable chair in a quiet room and allow the cat to approach, sniff, observe, and listen. Keep a close eye on your cat and provide positive reinforcement for calm behavior. Speak in soothing tones and use Kitty's name frequently.
- Don't leave your cat alone with your baby. Cats don't suck the air out of a baby's lungs, as in the old wives' tale, but it's still not good to leave them alone together. "Your baby can unexpectedly grab a tail or a hunk of fur, and then the cat may turn around and scratch in self defense," says Dr. Katherine Houpt, director of the animal behavior clinic at Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine in Ithaca, NY.
- Make sure Kitty is included. Let your cat watch from a safe distance and be around you when you are with the baby. Talk to your pet when the baby is present, so that she associates good things with the baby. "When my first son Wyatt was on the changing table, my cat, Jazz, always had a good eye view," says Anne Beholden of San Jose, CA. "He was curious as to what all the commotion was about. Jazz has always been a part of Wyatt's life."
- Give your cat as much attention as you did before. If Kitty's not receiving the same attention she got before the baby arrived, she could be on stress overload, explains Houpt. If you can

spare the time, try to give your cat some extra attention. "Even an extra half-hour a day of quality time helps," says Houpt.

- Give your cat an escape route. "When there's chaos or fuss around the baby, make sure your cat can get to a comfort zone - usually the place where she sleeps or catnaps," says Kross. Never force your cat to get up-close-and-personal with the baby before she is ready.
- Keep regular routines. Cats thrive on regular schedules. So even though your own schedule may be out-of-whack, try to keep your cat's routine constant. The last thing she needs right now is the extra stress of not knowing exactly when her next meal will be coming. So, make sure to feed her consistently at the same time every day.
- Prevent spraying and soiling. Cats spray and soil for lots of reasons. But worse than spraying are litter box mishaps, which may be signs of a health problem brought on by stress, says Houpt. If your cat is urine marking in strange places or even marking the baby's things, run, don't walk, to the vet to rule out a health problem. If a health problem is not to blame, your cat might be trying to let the baby know she's on her turf.

Clean the soiled areas with a good cleaner so that there is no trace of a smell left. Otherwise, your cat may keep going back. Getting her a cat tree with plenty of different levels will give her more turf to claim and reduce anxiety. She will also feel more secure from this vantage point. She can escape when things get to be too much, and she can get a better view of what's going on.

- Groom your cat regularly. "Your cat may shed from stress or seasonal change," explains Kross. "It's only a problem if your cat has any infectious diseases in her coat or your baby is allergic to the cat." Brush your cat regularly with a good cat brush (pin brushes and metal combs are helpful).

Overall, the two most lovable creatures in the universe, cats and babies, can get along. All it takes is preparation, patience, practice and common sense to keep your family happy and your home, peaceful for a long, long time.

A Word on Toddlers

While active toddlers and playful cats can live in peace, human moms and dads need to keep an eye on both of them. Give your toddler some toys to use with the cat so they can interact with each other in a positive way. A fishing pole toy is great since cats get a good work-out and each keeps a safe distance from the other.

If you are selecting a purebred cat, choose a breed that is known for getting along with children. "The Siamese and Tokinese are two purebreeds that get along with children the best," says Toby Hempel, author of *The Cat Lover's Handbook*.

Keep cats from passing parasites to your child, or causing other health concerns, by scheduling regular vet exams, vaccinations, and nail trimmings. Make certain your cat has her own eating and sleeping space away from your whirlwind toddler. And put the litter box where your toddler can't get at it. Cats need to feel secure when they are most vulnerable, that is when they are eating, sleeping, or using the litter box.

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If your pet is showing any signs of distress or you suspect your pet is seriously ill, CONTACT YOUR VETERINARIAN immediately.

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PetPlace.com**We Are Crazy About Pets!**

How to Introduce Your Dog to Your New Baby

By: Dr. Ilana Reisner

Introducing Your Pets to Your New Baby

Even the most realistic parents often underestimate the time and energy needed to care for a newborn. In the wake of a baby's homecoming, your pet will have to relinquish his spot as top dog. How, then, can you make sure that he doesn't become jealous?

Dogs vary quite a bit in how easily they welcome a new family member. You can help your pet accept his new role by taking a few simple steps.

While it's important to maintain your dog's daily schedule, you can gradually adjust his timetable by making changes at least a month or so before the baby arrives. Is his exercise routine likely to change, for example, from leash walks to yard time? Start making the change now. Will you be restricting his freedom by placing baby gates in doorways? Put some up well before the baby arrives. Early and gradual changes in the physical environment, and in daily routines, can help your dog adjust more easily once the baby comes home.

Let Dog Smell Baby Items

After your baby is born, but while he or she is still in the hospital, send home some items carrying his or her smells, including blankets or clothing. It's also a good idea to record your baby's noises and cries, letting someone play them for your dog to see his reaction and to acclimate him to the unfamiliar sounds. Dogs typically will show some interest but little agitation. If your dog seems particularly upset by your baby's sounds, ask your veterinarian for further information about safety issues.

Finally, when your baby comes home, be prepared with a collar and leash so that your dog can easily be controlled. A leash is preferable to continuous reprimands as your dog jumps up, excited to see his "mom" again. Another adult can hold your baby while mom and dog greet each other. After everyone has calmed down, you might allow your dog, still on a leash, to investigate little feet or hands.

Once his curiosity is satisfied, the average dog will ignore a newborn. However, for the sake of safety, even the most accepting and gentle dog should never be left alone with an infant, whether your baby is awake, sleeping, in a carrier, or on the floor.

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