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Anticipating the New Arrival

It can be a stressful time figuring out what is the best course of action to take when preparing your dog for a new addition to the household. Especially when this new addition is a baby. It is important that we understand the emotional needs of our dogs when considering this. Hopefully, with this helpful guidance, we can help you to prepare your dog for the anticipated arrival of your baby, as well as helping you understand your dogs' behaviour.

How your dog may feel about a new addition

As you can imagine, it can be quite emotionally challenging for dogs when their home life and routine is disturbed. Dogs love routine and familiarity, so when this is disturbed, they can display behaviours which may lead you to question "why is he/she doing this? They have NEVER behaved like this". Your dog may even feel a little jealous because they are not receiving the same attention they once got. It is therefore important to recognise these behaviours and to try your best to make your dog feel comfortable and safe.

What can you do to prepare your dog for the arrival of baby?

It is recommended that we begin desensitising our dogs to babies as soon as we know a little one is on the way. When dogs are puppies we desensitise them to other dogs, traffic, bin men, busy towns, and loud noises (fireworks, hoovers). It is not always appropriate at that time to do the same for babies, but there is no reason why training cannot be started later. Here is what you can do to help:

- ❗ **Sound therapy** - This is done in the same way we desensitised our dogs to fireworks. So, you would play the sounds of baby noises in the background when your dog is experiencing something positive. For example, you would play these sounds then your dog is having their dinner, having a play or a tasty chew stick.
- ❗ **Lead walking** - If you're likely to lead walk your dogs with a pram then start doing some training with your dog by walking with the pram. **(We don't recommend attaching the lead to the pram for safety reasons).**
- ❗ **At home** - As previously mentioned, your dog could display jealousy type behaviours, so it is important that they begin to become accustomed to not always getting all the attention. Although it may seem a strange thing to do and will most likely feel strange to do, but sometimes having a doll and imitating giving it attention, carrying it around the house, bouncing it on your knee, could

help your dog become accustomed to these actions. When doing this, have a handful of yummy treats to drop on the floor for positive reinforcement. So, if your dog jumps up whilst the doll is in your arms, gently place them on the floor and when all four paws are on the floor drop a treat to the ground. Don't ignore them as this can build up feelings of frustration and may cause undesired behaviours.

- 🐾 **Baby gates** - Some dogs won't be used to having baby gates up in the house and being segregated from certain rooms in the house. Place your baby gates in position early on and get your dog used to not being allowed in certain parts of the house now and then. Don't close off interaction entirely, as we want to avoid separation anxiety. Reassure them and offer a tasty treat or licki-mat to distract them from their feelings. Only leave them for small amounts of time to begin with and slowly build up the separation time.
- 🐾 **Scent swapping** - We recommend some scent swapping as well. So, before dog meets baby, he/she gets given a toy or blanket with baby's scent. When sniffing it they should be offered tasty treats for positive reinforcement.
- 🐾 **First introduction** - This should be done in open territory. If possible, don't bring baby into your dogs' territory on first meeting. Maybe meet in the middle, on a walk or at a family member's home? Keep dog on lead and baby in a carrier of sorts rather than in arms, to prevent the jealousy behaviours. However, it is recognised it isn't always easy to do this.
- 🐾 **For more tips on how to prepare, visit:** <https://www.dogtrust.org.uk/dog-advice/life-with-your-dog/at-home/preparing-your-dog-for-a-new-baby>.

Behaviours your dog may display

You may find that your dog shows **avoidance** behaviours. This can be displayed, for example, where they go to another area of the house away from the baby or hide somewhere. If they do this, you must allow them to do this, don't force them out of their hiding place. They have chosen to do this to help themselves "cope" and "de-stress" and is where they feel most comfortable. If they are displaying avoidance behaviours but have nowhere to hide then it would be beneficial to create a hiding space for them. This can be in the form of a crate covered with a blanket with some of their favourite soft toys in. Or perhaps, for smaller breeds, a low cupboard or the bottom of a wardrobe with a bed that they can curl up on.

Sometimes our dogs can show behaviours such as watching or staring and this is happening because they are trying to gather information. In this case the arrival of a new baby into their home, could be perceived as a "threat". It is important to recognise these behaviours and to not put either your dog or yourself in a dangerous position. These behaviours from a dog can quickly change if not given the time to gather information. This type of behaviour is called **Inhibition**.

Appeasement behaviours are displayed when your dog may be trying to exchange information (gathering and offering information) in a more active manner. Usually these behaviours are displayed due to negative emotions such as fear/anxiety which

wouldn't be uncommon when meeting your new baby. These behaviours can be sniffing, rolling over, licking, etc. In these difficult situations we offer reassurance, maybe a toy to help reduce any tension.

In extreme circumstances, you may find your dog displaying behaviours which are unsettling such as, growling or biting. This behavioural response is called *Repulsion*. The aim of these responses is to make the negative stimulus go away. The negative stimulus could be a crawling baby coming towards them or a crying baby. Now, biting is an extreme response and is usually a last resort response. Usually there will have been a few behavioural responses displayed before acts of repulsion occur and this is why it is important to recognise the different behavioural responses from your dog before it may get to this point. So, if growling is displayed then it is important that you remove the negative stimulus from the vicinity of your dog. However, with the appropriate desensitisation and training carried out in advance then this shouldn't be the case.

Pheromone/Nutraceutical Treatment

We strongly advise the use of pheromone treatment with all aspects of the prior training and when baby is here. There are many different types of treatment, and the great thing is that you can't overdo it. These treatments are nutraceuticals and non-prescription, meaning you can buy over the counter without seeing a vet. The different nutraceutical and pheromone options include sprays for things like their bedding, collars, plug-in diffusers, and chews. Ask a member of the team for more information.

Acknowledgements: 'The Heath Model of Emotional Health' Dr Sarah Heath FRCVS

To learn more about different behavioural responses, please see our handout about these.

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