



10 DOS & DON'TS

When Introducing Your Dog To Your New Baby



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Welcome!



Hi, I'm Kate.

I'm a professional dog trainer and certified behavior consultant specializing in fear and aggression. I've helped over 1850 dogs overcome issues their guardians thought were impossible – fear of strangers, separation anxiety, resource guarding, growling at toddlers and more. With over 5,240 hours of hands-on training fearful dogs, I have the relevant experience to rescue you and help you enjoy your dog again.

So whether you need help with a growly, bitey, fraidy dog, or are preparing for life with a new baby or your new dog just needs some manners, I can help and we can work together to improve your and your dog's quality of life.



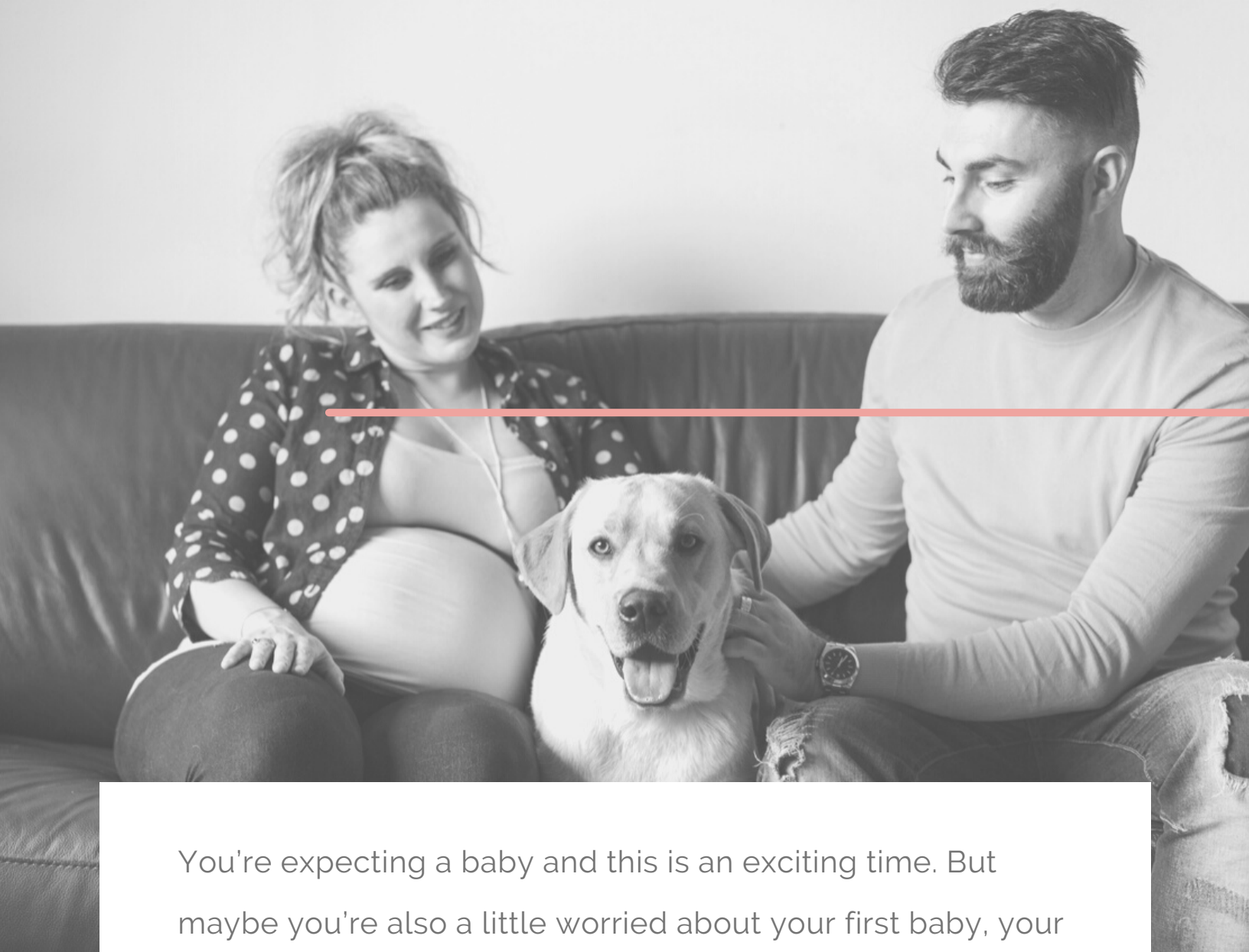
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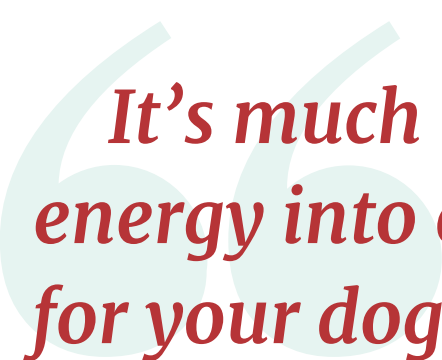
You're expecting a baby and this is an exciting time. But maybe you're also a little worried about your first baby, your dog, and how he might react to your new human baby. There's a lot of well-meaning, but misguided information out there on best practices for introducing dogs and babies.

This guide is intended to help you with some basic do's and don'ts but is not a substitute for personal one on one training, especially if your dog has behavioral issues like fear or aggression.

1

Don't bring the baby blanket home.

It's possible, even likely, you've been given the advice to bring home your baby blanket (well-meaning birthing professionals love to give out this outdated advice!) and present it to your dog to smell, and that this will somehow magically make your dog accept your baby. While this isn't an inherently bad idea, the danger lies in people thinking this is all they need to do. Bring home the baby blanket and "check, we've prepared dog for baby!"



It's much more valuable to channel energy into other pre-baby preparation for your dog like honing basic skills that will be needed for inclusion.

And let's think about this a little more logically. Do you ask other strangers to send over items of clothing ahead of their visit so you can introduce their smell to your dog? Before your plumber comes over, do you ask him to send over a t-shirt so your dog can get used to the smell? If you did, I'd guess you'd need to find a new plumber.

While we sometimes do use smell to help desensitize dogs to strangers they are uncomfortable with, the amount of time it would take to do that process is quite lengthy. So, unless you're in the unfortunate position that your baby is in NICU for many months, presenting your dog with your baby's smell on a blanket for a day or two before the baby comes home, isn't long enough to accomplish anything. Plus, if your partner is going back and forth between the hospital and home, they already smell like your baby, so the blanket really is unnecessary and unlikely to create any sort of lasting positive association.

It's much more valuable to channel energy into other pre-baby preparation for your dog like honing basic skills that will be needed for inclusion like perfecting verbal cues, supervised separation behind a baby gate, go to place, down-stay on a mat, no jumping, quiet on cue and leave it.

A black and white photograph of a baby sleeping peacefully in a baby carrier. The baby is wearing a light-colored, textured knit hat and a matching long-sleeved outfit. The carrier is placed on a light-colored wooden floor. The background is slightly blurred, showing more of the floor.

2

Don't put the baby carrier on the floor.

We've all see those videos of people bringing their babies home for the first time, plopping the baby carrier on the floor for the dog to come right up and stick their head into the baby carrier. Please don't do this. Not only is this incredibly unsafe, but your dog's sense of smell is so good that he doesn't need your baby on the floor to smell it or know your baby is home. More importantly, your baby is yours, not your dog's. You don't bring your pizza home and plop it on the floor for your dog to investigate, so why do this with your precious baby?

When you first come home, it's a good idea to have mom come in to greet your dog, since she's been gone for a few days. Greet your dog as normal. Then bring your baby in, still in their carrier and place them on a countertop or table, not on the floor. If your dog shows interest in the new smell of your baby, you can reward that interest but your dog doesn't need to be up close and in your baby's face to investigate or have an initial interaction. It's just not safe.



Image: Family Paws, LLC

3 Don't force interactions (even for pictures!).

For some dogs, the new baby being home may be a more difficult adjustment than for others. For dogs who are struggling, and want to keep their distance a bit, never force interactions. Never put your baby into your dog's space or force your dog to engage, sniff or come near your baby. And I know you want the perfect picture to post on social media but forcing any interactions between your dog and your baby, even for pictures, is one of the worst things you can do. Always invite your dog to come over, but never force it. If you invite him and he "votes with his feet" and declines, avoids or stays put, then he's clearly saying "no thanks, I'm not comfortable coming over."

When it comes time for pictures, make sure your dog is comfortable first and then position everyone appropriately - dog and baby are never to be next to each other - there's always to be a parent in between.

4

Don't punish, yell, or use force or aversives.

This is an emotional time; you're bound to be under slept and hormonal. It's easy to have a short fuse, overreact or be frightened if your dog responds in a way that surprises or scares you. But let's remember that dogs can only communicate through dog body language and that means when they feel upset, threatened or afraid, they may bark, growl, snarl, freeze, lunge or do other things that scare us.





If your dog is barking at your baby because he's afraid and you yell at him, he learns that the baby makes you scream. This can make him dislike your baby even more.

But worried dogs do these things because they're upset and it's up to you to help your dog feel more comfortable in that scary situation, even if you're also a little scared. We know that yelling, punishing or using aversive training methods like prong, choke and shock collars not only don't fix the problem or help make your dog feel better in that situation but they actually make your dog more afraid and make fear and aggression worse.

If your dog is barking at your baby because he's afraid, and you yell at him, now your dog learns the baby gets him yelled at, which can make him dislike your baby even more. Instead, we can help your dog feel safer by creating distance, using baby gates to create physical barriers and space between the dog and the baby and feeding or tossing high value food to your dog when he shows any signs of being upset.



5

Don't expect Hollywood perfection.

Life isn't a Hollywood movie. Nobody bounces back from childbirth or has a smooth adoption process like the movies lead us to think. Be gentle with yourself and your dog. You're both going through a lot of changes right now.



Be gentle with yourself and your dog.

You may be struggling with postpartum issues ([Postpartum Support International](#) is a great resource), with adjusting to your new normal or just struggling with everything. Your dog may be struggling with weird schedule changes, you waking up in the middle of the night, reduced exercise, sudden screaming from baby and other off-putting things. And it's understandable everyone is not acting themselves right now.

Many new parents struggle with feelings of inadequacy in the first months of homecoming, especially if their dog is stressed by the new baby. This is so common in fact, that new parents often go through what behavior professionals call an "impulsive rehoming phase," where parents question if rehoming might be a better option for the dog. "Maybe he'd be better off where he can get more attention." "Maybe she'd be happier in a home without a baby." These are common thoughts to have but, in most cases, this is not the best option, for the family, or the dog. But, it's easy for exhausted parents, who maybe aren't able to give their dog all the time and attention they used to before baby came along, to feel a little guilty and consider rehoming, thinking it might be the best thing for the dog.

Before making any rash decisions, I urge you to remember that this adjustment phase is temporary and you will find a new normal, a new routine and when that happens, usually your dog finds a place in that routine. It takes time and it doesn't happen overnight like Hollywood portrays. This is real life, not edited for entertainment, so be kind to yourself.

A grayscale photograph of a person wearing a cap and a backpack, petting a dog on a grassy hill. The person is seen from the side, and the dog is looking towards the camera. The background shows a hazy landscape with mountains and a body of water.

6

Do spend time with your dog.

Carve out time each day, even if it's only 5 minutes, to spend some one-on-one time with your dog. One of the biggest reasons for why dogs are rehomed after baby isn't really "no time" but that the bond between mom/dad and the dog has been broken. If you've got a special routine or game you do with your dog, try to preserve that. It is really important to try to have some alone time with your dog, even if it's only for a short time each day.

This might be for a grooming session or a snuggle when baby is napping or a game of fetch – whatever your dog loves to do with you. Not only will this give you and your dog both an oxytocin boost, it will help strengthen your relationship and lessen the tendency for you to go through the impulsive rehoming phase mentioned above.



7

Do supervise (or separate) dog & baby.

FAMILY PAWS®, LLC

Fully awake, adult supervision is critical to safe dog and baby interactions. Your baby will be growing and changing rapidly so it's important your dog sees those changes in real time, as much as possible, but it needs to be safe for baby and your dog needs to feel comfortable. The more solid your dog's basic obedience skills are (like down/stay on a mat with distractions,) the more inclusion your dog can safely have in day-to-day interactions. But if your dog doesn't have the basic skills to be safely included and if you don't have time to train up those skills, it's perfectly fine for your dog to be included without contact. Your dog can be included and still see your baby growing, moving and have that experience, safely from behind a physical barrier like a baby gate. Supervision is key. For more information on supervision, download the [5 Types of Supervision handout](#).

8

Do ask for help.

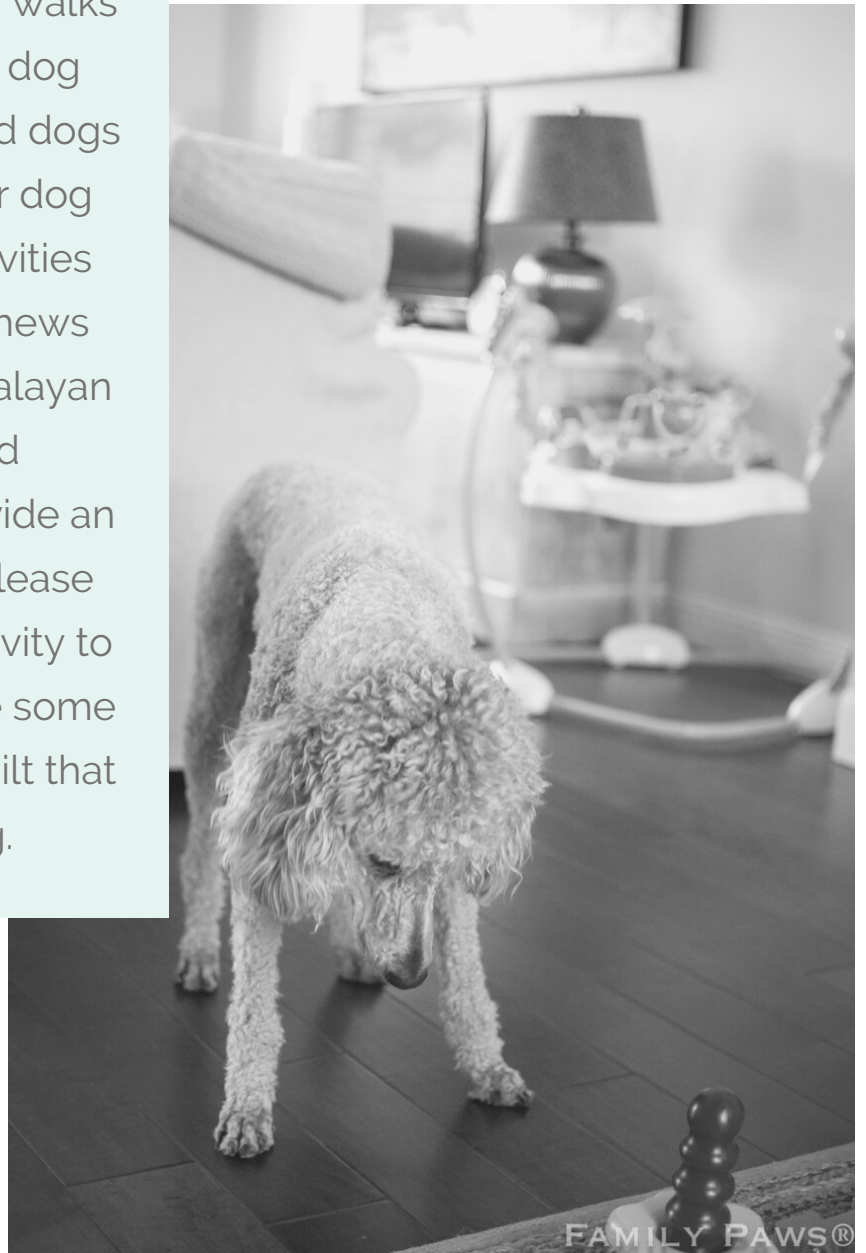


It can be hard to ask for help and new parents often feel a vulnerability they have never experienced before when they bring home their baby. This is all normal and it's important to recognize it's OK if you're overwhelmed and that you can ask for help. Often new babies bring a wealth of volunteers offering to help. Take them up on it – even if it's to help you help with the dog!

Put a list on the refrigerator of things you need to have done. Stuff food toys and put them in the freezer. Take the dog for a long walk. Play some games with the dog. Take care of the baby while you play with the dog or take him for a walk. Do the laundry. Make a dinner and freeze it for later in the week. Do the grocery shopping. The list is endless. People always want to help new parents, so take them up on their offer and don't be shy to ask them to do things for the dog if that will help alleviate some guilt and stress for you.

9 Do provide enrichment.

Often after baby arrives, schedules are in flux, dog walks get shorter, visits to the dog park get pushed aside and dogs get bored. Ensuring your dog has enrichment and activities like long Long-lasting chews (bully sticks, antlers, Himalayan chews, etc.) and food enrichment toys can provide an outlet for your dog to release energy, give them an activity to work on and can alleviate some of that doggy parental guilt that you might be feeling.





***Mealtime
should be
enrichment
time too – no
free food! Give
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When friends offer to come and help, have them make stuffed Kongs or stuff tracheas and stick them in your freezer for a quick thing to grab when you need to keep your dog quiet and entertained. Mealtime should be enrichment time too - no free food! Give that dog a puzzle to solve and a brain activity!

Kibble can easily be tossed into a kibble dispensing ball, sniffle mat or wobbler. Wet food can be put into a Kong or other stuffable toy or smeared onto a Licki mat. There's a whole world of enrichment toys out there but you can also make a lot of DIY toys with household items like cardboard boxes, brown packing paper, egg cartons, toilet paper rolls and the like. View enrichment ideas in this [video playlist](#).

A black and white photograph of a woman sitting on a couch, holding a baby. A dog is sitting next to her, looking up at the baby. The scene is indoors, likely a living room.

10

Do reward interest and investigation.

Inviting investigation and inclusion is your first step to integration. Once your dog is routinely settled and comfortable around your baby, you can invite your dog to investigate, or sniff, baby's heel (never the face or diaper area). This may not happen for several days or weeks, depending on your individual dog. Until that point, include your dog and allow observation at a safe distance. We never want your dog sniffing your baby's face in the event your baby startles the dog. Face to face proximity is just too dangerous and your dog's sense of smell is so strong that he doesn't need to be right up close and personal to get a good sniff.

Remember to always invite your dog over, never push your baby into your dog's space. If your dog politely declines, he's telling you he's not comfortable approaching and that's something you definitely want to listen to. If and when your dog does come to investigate, happy talk and reward him. The investigation doesn't need to be long and drawn out and even if he doesn't come all the way over, you can toss him a treat for any attempt, no matter how close or how long it lasted. Reward that attempt, tell him "Good job, buddy!" and keep it positive. Encourage future investigations and keep everything happy and positive so your dog starts to learn that approaching the baby when invited predicts good stuff happens.

Need more help?

Did you know that I publish a new blogpost each week, packed with important info on all things dog behavior? Check it out [here](#). I know you'll find it super valuable.

Need some 1:1 help with your dog? A private consult with me will get on the right path.

BOOK NOW

