



If you are pregnant or preparing for adoption, chances are that you have looked into all sorts of tips and suggestions for how to make this a smooth and positive transition for your current baby – your dog. It seems there is a great deal of information out there that points to the same exercise: carrying a doll. Yes, that's right – a doll! We have found that it is less important for the object to be a doll and more important that it weighs about 8-10 pounds. An easy option to use is a pillowcase full of water bottles or other moderately heavy objects.

Here are just a few of the reasons why this is a valuable exercise:

POSTURE

When you are holding a baby, your posture will change. Posture is a key factor in communicating with our dogs. Are you able to give cues to your dog while holding the "baby"? How does your dog respond? Practice sitting, walking, and lying down while holding your prop. Notice if there is a change in your effectiveness with your dog when you are in these different positions.

NO HANDS!

You will have your hands full a great deal more once your baby arrives. It is important that you can interact with your dog in a hands-free manner when giving cues. How does your dog behave when you are holding your prop on the couch? Sitting on the floor?

INTERACTION

What happens when you talk to your prop? Does your dog become excited? Confused? You may catch yourself "baby-talking" to your dog. This may become confusing once your human baby arrives.

LIFTING AND PASSING

How does your dog respond to passing your "baby" from one person to another?
What about lifting baby?

PRACTICE USING YOUR BABY CARRIER

Wraps and baby carriers will change your body shape. Some dogs may react to this extension of their human. Any postural change in the familiar human form may cause concern, stress, or excitability in some dogs. Some dogs may not care, but it is important to know if yours does **before** you bring home baby.

CONTROLLED, POSITIVE, AND RELAXED

This prop gives you a way to role play in a controlled, positive, relaxed manner. Teaching your dog how to behave around you while you are holding a baby is important and best done when relaxed. If you wait until after the baby arrives, you may be impatient and respond sharply – which can create a negative perception of the baby for your dog.

These are just some of the easy things that you can do to help prepare with your dog for your baby's arrival.

Most dogs do very well with their new human family members. Active preparation helps parents to feel confident and in control when the day comes to bring the new baby home. This confidence and calm control is the key to success and a truly wonderful beginning.

Let's get started! We want your dog to have a consistent response to verbal cues regardless of your body position or appearance. Keep in mind that baby wraps, backpacks, and simply holding your baby will change your appearance and focus for your dog.

ACTIVITY 1

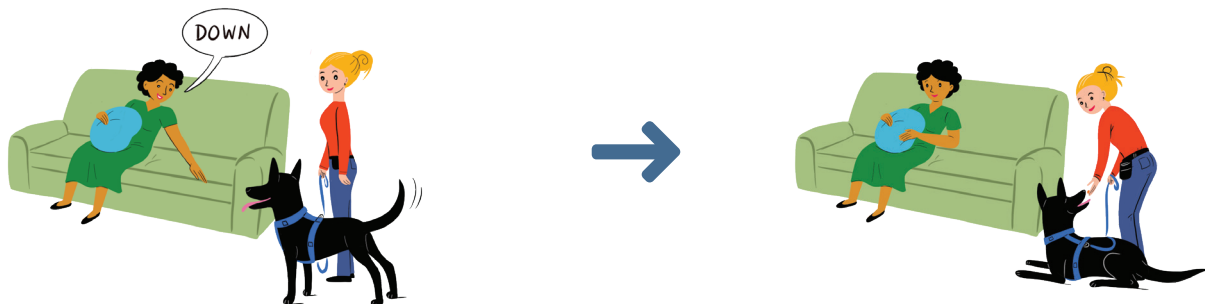
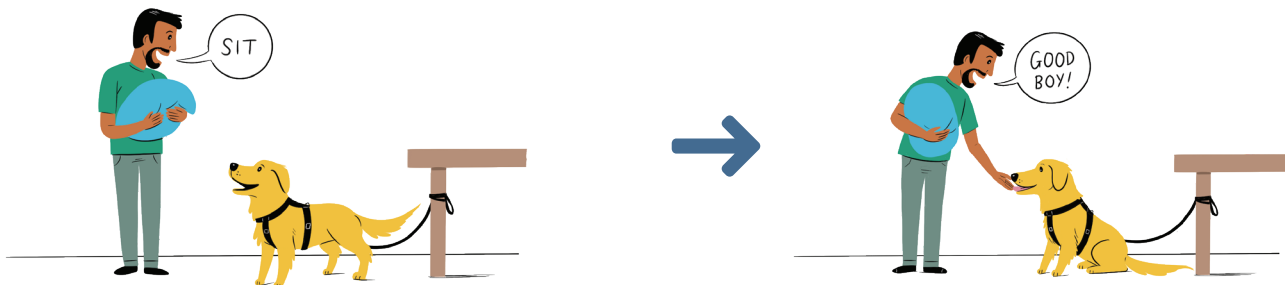
MATERIALS NEEDED

- Leash
- Treats
- Heavy piece of furniture or a helper
- An 8-10 pound object in a pillowcase to hold

GOALS

Your dog is able to reliably respond to cues given when you are holding your pillowcase "baby", regardless of your body position (standing, sitting, walking, etc.)

Before you begin: Make a list of known cues for your dog.
Choose one cue to begin ("sit" or "down" might be a good choice here).



ACTIVITY 2

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Treats
- An 8-10 pound object in a pillowcase to hold.
- Some type of barrier (like a baby gate, ex-pen, or crate) and/ or a helper.

GOALS

To familiarize and desensitize your dog to the act of lifting up/ setting down or passing a baby (and to teach your dog what you want them to do). This may be tricky for some dogs. Many dogs find this motion exciting and may be curious.



FINAL THOUGHTS

It is common to run into some difficulties as you work with your dog on these exercises. These exercises demonstrate the beginning steps (visual). To advance these skills you will also work to add additional stimuli into this exercise such as sounds, smells, etc. with the help of your Family Paws Parent Educator.

Your goals for these exercises will continue to evolve as you and your dog advance together.