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Bringing Home Baby  
Tara M. Sacramone, DVM

Bringing a newborn home is a time of excitement, joy, nervousness and stress. Now, imagine how your pets feel. There are several things you can do to make the transition easier for both you and your pets.

First of all, start to prepare them a few months before the new addition arrives. Set up the baby things as early as possible. Establish boundaries right away, for example if you don't want the cats in the playpen, don't let them start to nap in it before the baby comes home. If your pet is sensitive to loud noises, play with the toys that make noise. Hold a doll in your lap to get your pets used to you holding the baby. If you want your dog to go for walks with the stroller, start now. Sometimes you have to start with two people, one to hold the leash and the other to push the stroller, but eventually you can get most dogs to walk with only one person and a stroller.

Next, prepare the pets once the baby is born but not yet home. Bring home some clothes or blankets with the baby's smell on it and place them around the house.

The day you bring the baby home, have someone play with the pets for a long time prior to arrival. Take the dog for a long walk, play with the laser pointer, throw the ball; basically make the pets as tired as possible. Also, I know it's tempting to have people at the house when you first get home, but it's better for your pets to try to keep the first few hours as quiet as possible. Another helpful tip is to have Mom go into the house first WITHOUT the baby. The pets will want to say "Hi" and you don't want them jumping onto the baby.

Once the baby is in the house don't force any interaction. If your pets want to ignore the baby, let them. If they seem too interested, you may need to keep them separated, at least initially. It is also important to keep any dog on a leash for the first few introductions. The most important rule is to NEVER leave a baby alone with ANY pet. Even the nicest animal in the world can injure a baby, even if it is just an accident.

Lastly, always remember who your first baby was and try to spend some quality time with your pet(s) without the baby every day.

Hopefully these tips can help make the transition for the entire family a smooth one. Personally, I'm hoping they will help my family when I bring home my first baby in July 2008. I also wanted to let all Dunstable Animal Clinic clients know that I will be taking 8 weeks maternity leave, and then returning, but only part time. I plan on working Tuesdays and Thursdays and every other Saturday. Dr. Kim is still working on finding another veterinarian to cover the remaining days.