



Keeping babies and children safe around dogs in the home

- We know that having a dog can make children very happy and teach them about responsibility, how to be loved and loving, and how to respect living things. However, it is important to remember that dogs are a different species.
- Children tend to interact with dogs in the same way as they do with their friends, so hug them, cuddle them and tell them off.
- Children use very close facial contact which is very different to dog social behaviour and many dogs can find it threatening.
- From the dog's point of view, children behave very differently to adults. They are unpredictable and make a lot of noise. It is for these reasons that children are more likely to be bitten than any other population group. Therefore, there is a potential risk of harm to babies and children when they meet dogs.

There is a lot that parents can do to reduce the risk of dogs harming babies and children. This guide provides advice to parents looking forward to welcoming a new baby into the home, as well as those who already have children and a dog in the household. The advice provided should be shared with friends, neighbours, carers and relatives.

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Preparing for the arrival of a new baby

- Start preparing your dog as soon as possible for the lifestyle changes a new baby will bring (such as potential changes in walking times, and restrictions on where your dog can go in your home).
- Play sounds that your baby will make and bring out your cot and pram so your dog can get used to them.

For additional fact sheets see www.ihv.org.uk

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- Create an area that your dog can go to and relax when you are looking after the baby. Teach him/her to go there using toys and other treats.
- Ensure that worming, vaccinations and flea treatments are up to date. Some families will be eligible for free or low-cost care from some animal welfare charities (such as the Blue Cross and the People's Dispensary for Sick Animals (PDSA)).
- Families with assistance dogs can expect training and ongoing support from the relevant assistance dog charity (such as Guide Dogs and Medical Detection Dogs).
- If you have any concerns about how your dog is behaving or how they may respond to a new baby, seek advice from your vet or an animal welfare charity (such as the Dogs Trust or RSPCA). They may recommend further advice from a behaviour expert who can help address problems early on, ensuring a smooth introduction. **Do** share your concerns with your midwife or health visitor.

Welcoming a new baby into the home

- Your dog is very likely to be curious. By allowing him/her to see, hear and smell the new baby under strict supervision, they will learn that the baby is nothing to be worried about.
- The noises that babies make and their movements can remind some dogs of prey so **Never leave your baby alone with any dog no matter how safe or friendly you think they are and always supervise whatever the situation.**
- Continue to ensure your dog is exercised, well fed and given attention. In the event, you are unable to meet the welfare needs of your dog, seek early advice from your vet or an animal welfare charity. Also, share your concerns with your midwife or health visitor.

Children and dogs

- As babies become toddlers and toddlers become older children, contact with any dog needs to be supervised by an adult.
- Ensure your dog always has access to a safe place to retreat to if they become stressed or want to go somewhere quiet. Teach your child not to approach your dog when he is in his safe place.
- Teach and watch your child to make sure they do not run and shout around your dog, invade their personal space, hurt or tease them, or disturb them when they are eating, guarding a toy, sick or in pain. Teach your child how to play nicely with your dog.
- Learn the behaviours which dogs use to tell us when they are happy, worried or angry. Watch what your dog is doing so that you can intervene if they are showing signs that they want to be left alone or appear angry, stressed or worried.

Additional Resources:

A new baby and the family dog

<https://www.dogstrust.org.uk/help-advice/factsheets-downloads/factsheetnewbabynov13.pdf>

Growing up with a dog

<https://www.rspca.org.uk/adviceandwelfare/pets/dogs/company/children>

Understanding dog behaviour

<https://www.rspca.org.uk/adviceandwelfare/pets/dogs/behaviour/understanding>

How kids SHOULD interact with dogs

<http://www.allpetseducationandtraining.com.au/how-kids-should-interact-with-dogs---dr-sophiayin.html>

How kids SHOULD NOT interact with dogs

<https://drsophiayin.com/blog/entry/kids-and-dogs-how-kids-should-and-should-not-interact-with-dogs/>