



## **Baby Equipment, Supervision and Family Dogs...Prepare Ahead!**

### **New equipment reactivity**

Baby equipment is brought into homes with anticipation and many emotions. Often, parents are excited about these new items. Companion animals sense the newness and excitement. Here are some things to consider as you bring in new items for your little one:

1. Does your dog love to chase anything and everything?
2. Is your dog reactive to sudden motion? Does he startle easily?
3. Is your dog sensitive to noise? Loud noises? Soft noises? Sudden noises? High or low pitched noises?

### **Supervision**

Adults in charge of supervising a baby must **never** allow the dog to remain in the room alone with a baby – for even a second! This is a consistent and key factor in most reports of attacks on newborns by dogs, so this point must not be taken lightly. If the adult is not there for the dog to defer to and the baby makes noises, the dog may be the first to respond, and possibly try to tend to the baby. This can be very dangerous, as dogs communicate with and tend to their young very differently than humans do.

### **What can caretakers and parents do to prevent such incidents?**

It is best to introduce baby swings and all baby equipment to the family dog **prior** to the arrival of the baby. These days, baby equipment is full of gadgets! Equipment may vibrate, make music, swing, or even rotate. It is important to know your dog's individual sensitivities and prepare him well ahead of time. Some points to consider with baby equipment:

1. Once a swing is in motion, some dogs find the natural desire to chase hard to control.
2. The humming noise of a vibration device in a piece of equipment can be irritating for some dogs. Likewise, music coming from baby equipment can startle and agitate some dogs.
3. Spinning objects that are meant to be visually stimulating to an infant may be enticing to a dog, too.



It is important that family dogs learn how to behave calmly around all baby equipment prior to its use with an infant. Practice before your baby comes home by placing a doll in your baby's swing and in other equipment. Some dolls make noises, blink their eyes, etc. – much like a real baby. It can also be extremely helpful to put a play yard or other boundary around the equipment, so preventing the dog from having direct access.

### **Baby Bouncers**

These are a great place to set baby down for a little while as you get a few things done. However, bouncers usually sit on the floor, which means that the baby will be easily accessible to your dog. The motion of these devices, coupled with movements babies make while in them, will likely draw the dog's interest. When your baby is in a bouncer, make sure there is a closed door or gate between dog and baby, or that the bouncer is securely out of reach.

### **Practice time with Dolly**

Make practice time a positive experience! Reinforce your dog for calm and appropriate behavior. What are some desirable and safe behaviors your dog can offer? Refreshing and practicing cues or manners now goes a long way towards a smoother transition once baby arrives. Practicing ahead allows time for your dog to safely explore the new equipment, as you teach him how you want him to behave. Remember, your dog will react a bit differently when the real baby is included – and you will be calmer having practiced your responses ahead of time.

### **Have a plan for situations such as the phone ringing or a visitor knocking at your door. Here are some ideas:**

1. Close the door to the room where the baby is or take the dog with you.
2. Put a leash on your dog in the house to keep him nearby, or to use as a tether to furniture if you need to safely secure him.
3. Use a baby gate that you must physically lock in place to secure your dog when the baby is present. (Do not trust baby gates for dogs who like the high jump!)
4. Have your baby in a carrier.
5. Offer your dog some great outdoor activity in a secured area.

Even if you prepare ahead, It is normal and one should expect that their dog will show interest in equipment once the baby is placed in it. Some families struggle with this and would benefit from the support and expertise of their local Family Paws Parent Educator

(<https://www.familypaws.com/member-directory/>). Don't worry, you are not alone! We are here to help you succeed.