Making sure your baby and dog get along

When adding a baby to your family, it can be a scary time for your dog (and you!) with all new smells, sounds, less attention and changes to their regular routines. It's important that you plan and start introducing changes before the baby comes, so that your dog doesn't associate the changes (such as being kicked out of your bed) with the arrival of bub as it can lead to behavioural issues around the baby. Here are some helpful tips to prepare your dog for such a big change.

Before the baby arrives – the aim is to get them used to the rules and routines that will be present when the baby comes

1. Concentrate on basic obedience training. The most important ones are "sit", "down", "leave it" and "come".
2. Change up their routine regularly such as their walk time, feeding time, mix up the person who takes them for walks and introduce any dog walkers or Doggy day care's you might be using once the baby comes.
3. If the house rules are going to change, then start changing them early. For example, if they will no longer be sleeping in your bed, if they will be spending their days in a different room or if they are no longer going to be allowed on the couch. You may have to make these changes gradually if your dog is struggling with the change to their regular routine so it's important that this is started well in advance of your due date and that the changes become their regular routines which they are comfortable and familiar with.

4. Desensitize them to crying noises by playing realistic you tube videos whilst your dog is relaxed and being fed treats and given cuddles. You want them to associate the noise with something pleasant. The aim is for your dog to be completely relaxed and unphased so that when your baby cries, you can fully concentrate on them rather than an anxious dog needing attention at the same time.

<u>When the baby arrives</u> – the aim is to build a positive association with your baby's presence

5. Let everyone else into the house first so your dog can say a normal hello and once calm, place a leash on them when the baby comes in. Make sure there aren't too many blankets over the baby so that the dog can see them and acknowledge that the baby has arrived into your lives. Give your dog lots of treats and reward them for being calm.
6. Never force an interaction between the dog and your baby. Reward them when there is a calm interaction.
7. **Never leave a child unsupervised with a dog**
8. Ensure you still give your dog attention (and not just when the baby is asleep) so that they don't associate the baby's presence with being ignored. When feeding and settling the baby, you can throw some treats to the dog and talk to him/her so they are still getting attention.
9. Have some kongs and toys which entertain them for a while for times when you just can't give them attention
10. When the baby cries, throw some treats or toys to your dog if they are starting to feel anxious

<u>Within the first 6 months of baby arriving</u> – the aim is to get them used to rough handling by a child

11. When your dog is relaxed, start to very gently touch their ears, face, eyes, nose, nails, back and feet. Once they are comfortable with this gentle handling, start to increase the roughness of it over time. You always want the dog to be relaxed and feel like you are just giving him attention and cuddles. You want to build this up to you being able to pull on their ears and their tail etc without them having any major reaction.
12. Get your dog used to having some weight on their body to prepare for a child sitting or leaning on them. Again, start with just some gentle pressure and slowly build up to more weight.
13. Always teach your child very early on, how to interact safely and gently with your dog and learn to read the stress signals of your dog so that when the interactions get too much for them, you remove them from the situation.

14. Always have room for you dog to be able to move away from the presence of your child if they are becoming too much for them. If your dog moves away, don't let your child follow them.

Remember to implement these changes well in advance of the arrival of your baby and never leave your child unsupervised with a dog.

Dr Nicky