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Growing Up With Pets Fact File: *Introducing Infants and Pets*

When mom brings home a newborn baby, she also introduces new sights, sounds, smells and social patterns to the scene. When a family welcomes a child into a home where a pet has ruled as king for several years, changes occur, says Catherine Cross, DVM, Fort Collins, Colo.

Before Baby

- *Think ahead*. Prepare for an infant's arrival at least one month in advance; set up the crib; put up the baby gate; and establish barriers to entry early so pets aren't surprised that they cannot enter a room they once were free to roam.
- *Play with dolls*. Purchase a realistic baby doll, wrap it in a blanket and have mom carry it in her arms to "practice" for when the infant comes home. Notice how the pet responds.
- *Bring home a blanket*. Allow the pet to sniff a garment that carries the infant's scent to familiarize it with the new family member.

Smooth Transitions

- Spend time with your pet while the newborn is sleeping.
- Make alterations to the home gradually.
- Never leave infants alone with pets.

Role Reversal

- Before bringing the baby home, redefine the pet's role so it understands that it is not a surrogate child.
- Change habits, like entering the bedroom, gradually.

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