

Preparing Your Pet for the “New Kid”

If your pet pushes to get between you and your newborn, steals baby blankets or goes into hiding, don't assume he's jealous and needs time to “get over it.” According to Colleen Demling, president and founder of Pawtopia Pet Care, jealousy is a human emotion. “In the dog's mind,” says Demling “the baby is a lower-ranking pack member, and [Fido] is trying to show his dominance.” Cats see the new arrival as an invasion of territory. While most pets adjust to a baby quickly, problem pet behaviors become permanent if they aren't dealt with right away.

Demling says there are several ways to help your pet adjust to the newest member of the family:

- Spend time alone with your pet so that he understands he is still part of the family.
- Have food handy during interactions with the newborn; that way he'll associate positive feelings with the baby.
- Be firm, but don't punish your pet severely when he misbehaves or he'll associate the baby with punishment.

Of course, if you have serious concerns about your pet's behavior, contact an expert immediately, and even if your pet is well behaved, never leave him alone with your baby. — CC