

## Keeping Pets With Kids

by [Diane Novak](#)

Animals In Our Lives

*Can I Still Keep My Cat Now That I'm Pregnant?*

**Why not?** Just get someone else to change the litter box & ask for our reprinted article *Fact Vs. Fears re: toxoplasmosis*.

My Vet swears that in all his years of practice the fastest way to see a dog or cat get kicked out of a house is to add the birth of a new baby. That's sad and I think for the most part may be unnecessary.

When my child was born we had seven animals. He is now four years old and we still have seven animals. Some of the problems people encounter when they bring the new baby home are based on misconception about the animal's intention.

Animals are curious by nature and will inspect and investigate new people and things that turn up in their living space. Once you understand what may be going on, you'll realize your pet and your new baby can live in concert with each other. So take a deep breath, read on and get ready to throw out some basic misconceptions about pets and babies and why you all can't live together harmoniously.

Admit it, you're apprehensive about being able to have your cat and do the right thing for the baby, or you're concerned that you won't have enough of that precious commodity 'time' for everyone. You won't, but that has nothing to do with your pet. Your baby is going to take up all your time-all that was once your 'free' time and anything in between. But, after the initial few months you'll get into a swing and you'll figure out what needs your attention *now*, and what can wait. Your pet will be very patient, so don't assume you'll need to find kitty or spot a new home-chances are you will regret it if you do anyway.

At first you'll be a little apoplectic about cleanliness. You'll get past it just as the diaper commercials joke-trust me on this one. Here are a couple of scenarios that may occur when you bring baby home:

- 1-Baby comes home: Kitty freaks out and hides. The crying scares him/her. This is natural.
- 2- Baby comes home and the cat/dog thinks she/he smells great and wants to get a closer sniff. Also natural.
- 3- Baby comes home: and Kitty hops *in the crib*. You freak, but it's natural!

It's important to be prepared so you don't think there's something-strange going on. Every animal will react differently to a change in his or her environment. A baby is a huge change for everyone, but it is something that can be handled.

Check your motives, if you are determined as I was to keep my animals and maintain the same 'family' I had before baby was born, you will get through this together in one piece. It takes commitment and patience and YOU CAN DO IT!

A sad fact is forty-five percent of all cat owners do not keep their cats for the life of the animal. Because of this, I have decided to highlight the feline for the purpose of this article. **Some of the top reasons cats are given up are: Divorce, Allergies, and New Baby!**

My mission here is to get you over the 'hump' of what I call 'overwhelm' when your baby and your pet(s) are all tugging for attention. In six months you will see how the thing that worried or caused you grief will no longer be an issue. Some sage advice to remember is: This too shall pass. With patience and sheer determination, you will have emerged victorious and *together* as a family. All it takes is patience, understanding and a good sense of humor, and hey, you're going to need those skills for motherhood anyway! So let's get going!

**Begin By Introductions:** You know those little blue or pink hats they hand out to all the newborns at the hospital? Before we brought the baby in the house, I went into the house first with the little hat as well as the little drool towel he used that day. Both carried his scent.

I allowed the cats and dogs to sniff the items and shove it around with their noses and left it there on the floor for them to investigate. (For those of you, who think that's disgusting, don't call child protective services on me just yet, these items are washable.) When we brought the baby in: Lo and Behold, he smelled familiar!

While one of us was holding the baby, we knelt down on the animal's level and one of us petted the dogs and cats while speaking in low tones. The animals seemed very interested in Grant. We allowed them to follow us around and be part of our first moments together as a family. I never had a problem with the dogs, and only one cat (who had a little personality problem to start with) seemed to have *every* 'natural' reaction listed.

**Animals Are Curious By Nature, Not Devious:**

Some things are just too interesting to pass up. You bring home this new live 'thing'. It smells and looks different and you fuss over it non-stop. For a cat, this is interesting stuff and there's no time to waste in finding out more about 'it'.

## **Looking At The New Baby Scenario From A Cat's Point Of View:**

Your people love and spoil you, and NEVER BEFORE have you been restricted from entering ANY room in the house. Because of this, you figure you'll just go in to this new room and check its new inhabitant out. BIG MISTAKE!

Never did it occur to you that there are NEW HOUSE RULES and that this new little human and its room is now off-limits. Further more, never could you have imagined that pushing those limits would be synonymous with 'all hell breaking loose.' However, had you known that pushing those 'limits' would mean certain banishment from the home you love, surely you would not have put yourself in jeopardy and made your people so ANGRY.

Most likely you would have never jumped into the crib when the baby wasn't there. Who wanted to hear all that yelling and fussing? Why it sent you straight under the bed quaking with fear. But hey, you thought, they must have misunderstood what I wanted. Maybe if I get in there under the covers when the little human is sleeping, they'll understand what I really want and start loving ME the way they do him/her. Oh major mistake-a-roni!

What follows is a hail of screams the likes of which you've never heard or seen before. Then you hear it! The battle cry cats have heard through the ages: 'WE HAVE TO GET RID OF THE CAT!' He's trying to hurt the baby!

HARDLY! In fact you don't even like the brand of milk it drinks. You'd just like to know what all the fuss is about-and how to get some of the warm fuzzies that has now been reserved for the little human.

**For The Humans:** But once you understand what's at play here and can put it all into perspective, you will be ready to swing into action.

**Suggestion Number 1:** When my son was an infant, my husband came up with the idea of putting a screen door up in the baby's room. He took down the regular door, and we replaced it later on when my son was older (when I might add the cats wanted nothing to do with him). If the baby needs you, you'll hear it crying and kitty stays safely out of the baby's room.

**Suggestion Number 2:** Take time out for your kitty. I know that when my son was born, I was wiped out because he didn't sleep through the night for fifteen months. The last thing I wanted to do was a pet a cat or dog. But, they weren't going to accept this NEW BEHAVIOR OF MINE and they let me know it. . . Wherever I sat down, (and I mean WHEREVER) a cat jumped on my lap or a dog lay by my feet.

At night when I finally curled up in my bed or couch exhausted from the day I'd find an animal next to me craving attention. In the beginning, they first reacted communally by giving me my space. One day it dawned on me that they were 'depressed'. They moped around the house and had no 'spirit' like they used to. When I saw this, I managed to put aside some few precious

minutes a day (that's all they needed) for giving them some praise or a scratch behind the ears. I realized that they desperately needed the thing I had eliminated from their lives for too long: touch and communication.

We managed to work it out and I'm so glad that we did! Working in rescue just breaks your heart to see so many animals being shuffled from home to home and sometimes never making it out of the shelters. How many of the families that placed them there could have actually stuck it out too? No one is saying it's easy. But it's the right thing to do and sometimes the right thing isn't necessarily the easiest.

Now kick off your shoes, sit on the couch, fold those little layette sets and remember to pet that kitty!