



Hanne Grice

In association with Dog Listener

How to ensure your dog and baby bonds - by Jan Fennell

We are now in the 21st Century, yet there remain many myths that are considered good advice. One of these is that when a baby is expected there is possible danger from the family dog. Where this belief came from I do not know, but I can assure you that if the situation is handled properly, there is the potential for a superb relationship between your dog and your new child.

Through my research into dogs and their behaviour I have discovered that as dogs have descended from wolves, the dog's wolf instincts tell them that they too need leadership. Unfortunately as Man has developed, we have taken it for granted that our canine companions have evolved too. As humans, we think that they understand the world we live in, and more importantly, we assume that they understand us! We think that because we feed, water, groom and exercise our dogs, the dogs must realise that we are the leaders. Wrong! Dogs believe that the family is their "pack"; they also know that there must be a leader for the pack, but the dogs aren't convinced that the owners are the leaders. This is why most dogs (and all the dogs I deal with professionally) take on the responsibility of Alpha, because the humans aren't up to the job! My method (as set out in *The Dog Listener* and *The Practical Dog Listener*) shows people how they can become the leader of their "pack" and in turn, solve many different canine behaviour "problems".

If a dog reacts to a new baby in the home, the child's parents don't understand the reason behind the reaction. They automatically panic that the dog is "becoming aggressive" and usually the dog is removed from the equation. In my experience, if a dog believes it is the leader of the pack, it believes that it's responsible for looking after and protecting its pack. If a new baby arrives, the pack increases by one more member. The dog isn't capable of looking after its human pack members in the first place, and when the pack increases, the dog begins to feel really out of its depth and starts to panic. It realises the vulnerability of the new baby means extra responsibility, and the dog just can't cope!

As the transformation of your house occurs in preparation for your new arrival, as new parents you would be well advised to also consider the transformation you can give to your dog. I'm not talking about a new haircut or a new lead! I'm talking about transforming your dog's life, from being that of the stressed out Alpha to that of the relaxed, responsibility-free subordinate.

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As any doctor will tell you, "prevention is better than cure" so why not help to prevent any potential problems from occurring when your new baby arrives by working with your dog beforehand? By using my method of Amichien Bonding well in advance of the baby's arrival, you as parents are able to take over the role of leader, demoting your dog from its original top dog position right down to the bottom of the pecking order. Once in this position, your dog doesn't have anyone underneath him in the pecking order to feel responsible for; therefore, he can live a totally stress free life. This means that the arrival of your new baby can be a lot less stressful as far as the dog is concerned!

To add to this, I would also recommend that your dog be away in another room when you bring your baby home. This means that you can come in and get the baby settled without the dog being involved. Then I would suggest that you go through to where your dog is and using my "5 minute rule" (i.e. ignoring your dog until he settles down), you should go about reuniting with your dog.

The next stage is introducing your dog to your baby. However, this doesn't necessarily need to take place as soon as you get the baby home. In order for the introduction to take place successfully you need to be relaxed and calm, so if you don't feel up to introductions on your first day home, that's fine. When you are feeling ready, I suggest that one parent takes the baby through into the sitting room and sits down and relaxes. Your dog can then be brought into the room, on lead, by the other parent or someone the dog is totally happy with. The person with your dog can then sit near to the person holding the baby, and just casually chat to one another. The important part of this is to remain calm and happy at all times. If your dog is agitated or simply won't settle, then I suggest you take the dog out and leave it in another room for a little while and then try again. Once you are all able to sit in the room and the dog is settled on lead you can then take it to the next stage.

The person with the dog can then get up and move closer to the one holding the baby. The key to this technique is to take everything in small stages. Every time you move closer, let your dog settle before moving even closer to the baby. The stage to aim for is for both people to be seated beside each other with the dog settled and relaxed at your feet. At this point you should only let the dog sniff at the baby's feet rather than getting too close to the baby's head or face, etc.

When the baby makes a noise or cries it is essential that the family stay calm. Remember that a baby's cry is designed to get attention, as a baby's survival depends on being cared for. Do not be surprised if your dog becomes agitated when your baby lets rip. If you go to baby without making a huge fuss, the dog will see that there is nothing to become upset about and will calm down quite quickly. It is very easy to make something of nothing, and once that happens it is very hard to reverse the reaction.

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The basis of my method is to communicate with your dog using the language that it understands - "Canine". Once you are both communicating in a universal language, your dog will be able to understand what you request it to do and you should have no concerns about the relationship between dog and child provided you supervise all situations carefully. It should go without saying that no child should be left unsupervised with a dog for any period of time.

Dogs are not toys and should be treated with the respect that they deserve. They are not there to be man handled, and until your child is old enough to learn respect for animals, it is up to you as parents to supervise any interaction your child has with your dog. If you are considering getting a dog and already have children in the family you must make sure that you have thought the idea through thoroughly before making the trip to the breeder or the local rescue centre. You need to make sure that you have the time, energy, but most of all an open mind and the patience to take on a dog. You must never consider buying a dog purely because the kids have pleaded with you incessantly for one. It is not wise to get a dog purely to keep the kids amused. Dogs are feeling, breathing creatures, not babysitters!!

Can you afford to keep a dog regularly fed, watered, wormed and vaccinated? What will you do with a dog when it comes to going on holiday? All these questions and more need to be answered before considering taking on a dog. If, however, you can honestly say that you can offer all these things to a dog and decide to get one, then provided you let the dog know where its place is within your "pack's" pecking order from day one, you can then experience one of the best relationships you will ever know.

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