



## **Underdog Training and Behaviour Consulting**

### **When Freddy Meets Fido**

#### **Preventing problems between a newborn baby and your dog**

We are all aware of the problems that can occur between dogs and children. There are many physical and psychological injuries associated with dog bites every year and some frightening statistics suggest that the offending dog is often the family pet. Some of these interactions have resulted in the tragic death of newborn babies. Alarmed? Don't be. The good news is that many of these incidents are preventable through good training and socialisation- of the human family as well as the dog!

We've all heard the saying prevention is better than cure. Nothing could be more accurate when it comes to children and dogs. If you are thinking of starting a family or already pregnant and have a dog in the family, consider the following questions and tips below

- Has your dog been exposed to children before? Is your dog relaxed in the presence of children of different ages and activity levels?
- Has your dog been in the presence of a crying baby and/ or a crawling toddler?
- How will your dog's routine change with the arrival of a new baby?
- Will the dog be restricted to certain areas of the house or become an outside dog?
- Are you prepared to closely supervise your dog and child?
- Does your dog have unwanted behaviours like jumping up and/ or mouthing that could prove problematic either during your pregnancy or with a newborn baby?
- Do you know how to respond to your dog if they behave inappropriately in the presence of your child?
- Have you considered your child and someone else's dog AND your dog and someone else's child?
- How will you introduce your new baby to the dog when you come home from the hospital?

What can you do now? Consider changing your routine regularly now so that your dog does not have expectations that are set in stone. Think about what you will and won't be able to do when you have a baby- will the dog be receiving less stimulation and interaction? Training exercises in the home can be used to tire an active dog and utilising dog walking or day care services can be helpful in some situations. Supervision is vital- a dog should never be left alone with a child, regardless of size, breed or personality.

Teach your dog to leave the baby's toys alone- you can use the dog's powerful sense of smell to do this by scenting the baby's toys with baby powder and letting the dog know that toys which smell this way are not for him! You can also limit the material your dog's toys are made out of- if the baby is going to have lots of soft cuddly toys- think about investing in toys for your dog made from good quality rubber or safe plastics to reduce confusion.

When you bring the baby home, be sure to come in and greet the dog first- without the baby. As you will have been absent for at least a few days- your dog will be excited and needs to settle before being introduced to the new family member.

If you will want to walk the dog with the baby, start teaching your dog to walk close by an empty pram. Prams can frighten some dogs so it is vital that this training is done before the baby is in the pram. NEVER tie your dogs lead to the pram- no matter how small or well behaved the dog. You can also teach your dog to walk around bouncer nets and floor mats/ rugs by setting up the equipment and using a lead to guide the dog around the items. Remember to provide plenty of rewards for the dog being respectful of them- not barging through, jumping on or over them.

These exercises must be done before the baby has arrived so that there is no negative association with the newest family member, so start during your pregnancy. Remember that if you completely isolate your dog from the baby- you isolate them from you- and that's where many problems can begin.

Consider these tips and questions carefully and seek professional help to ensure the relationship between your dog and your children is a great one. Tamara and Stuart would love to see you for a When Freddy Meets Fido session during your pregnancy! If you are located outside Victoria, we have distance learning packages available.

Tamara Jackman and Stuart Mulholland

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