

Introducing Pets to Your New Baby

As you may know one of our vets Matt Allen and his wife Ruth recently welcomed home their new baby Jameson. Such a cutie!

One of our first questions working in a vet clinic was: how did Lily take it?



Lily is Matt's beautiful ginger cat who you may recognise from the fantastic training video we recently posted:

Lily and Matt Video:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ix84u6E3bHM>

So as we were talking about the steps Matt had taken and those of other vets when they took their babies home we thought this information might be useful to other parents of human and animal babies wanting to know how to make a smooth transition.

We should point out that all animals are different and everyone may find different things work for them, its all about trial and error and knowing your pet best. Here is what worked for Matt and Ruth.

Cats can be very sensitive to changes in the environment, new objects, smells and sounds can upset them very easily. Its important to make these changes gradual rather than all at once and your pet may associate all of this change (which they perceive to be negative) with that of the arrival of the baby.

For particularly anxious dogs/cats, consider placing a canine pheromone product (DAP—dog appeasing pheromone) or Feliway (cat calming pheromone) diffuser in the house about 2 weeks before the baby's arrival.

One way Matt and Ruth used to get Lily used to the new smells that would soon be in the environment is using the shampoo, body lotion and baby powder that Jameson would be using on themselves.

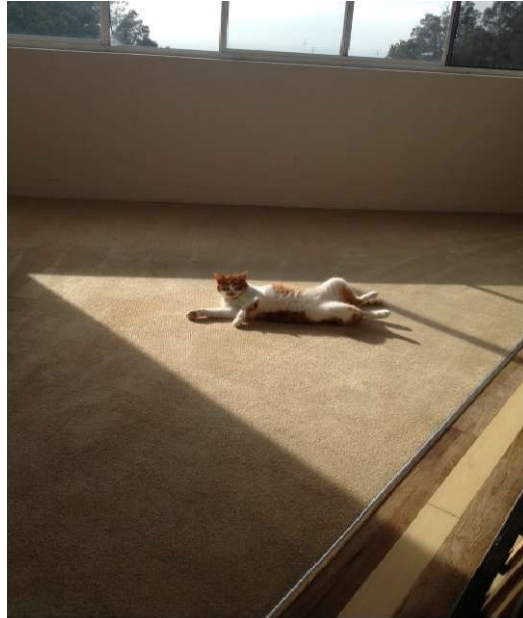
They also gradually introduced the new furniture into the house and allowed Lily to investigate it.



Some owners report putting balloons or tin foil in the crib before the baby arrives to scare of the cat. Matt tried tin foil with Lily and she just thought it was a game and had a great time. Just another example that what may work for someone else may not work for you.



Indoors vs. outdoors: some people will want their pet to now be an outside only animal where previously they have been living indoors due to the arrival of the baby. Once again this is something that should be done far in advance to the arrival of the baby so your pet doesn't associate the arrival of the baby as the reason this change has occur.



Also there may be other restrictions within the house for example Matt and Ruth didn't want Lily in their room where the crib would be during the night, previously Lily had been allowed to come into the room during the night. So they started to keep the door closed long before Jameson arrived so Lily could adjust to this change.



Usually when a new baby enters the household, the adults ignore the pets when the baby is active and give the pets attention when the baby is sleeping. Inadvertently this teaches the pet that the baby is something negative (baby equals no attention) and that the absence of the baby is a good thing. This is the opposite message that we want to give our pets.

Therefore, make a point of trying to pay attention to the pets when the baby is active/present. This can be done with verbal engagement or if two adults are present, one adult can attend to the baby and the other adult can pet or play games with the pets. When the baby is sleeping, you should pay less attention to the pets.



Dr. Julia Crawford said she kept a mosquito net over her crib to keep the cat from jumping in there and putting cat hair everywhere. Ruth also discussed the importance in keeping the cat away from areas the baby would be we must remember that there are diseases that are transmissible from animal to human and we want to avoid the spread of this where possible by keeping areas clean and keeping up to date with worming pets.

It is important to remember that no child should ever be left alone with a pet; even the "best" pet may hurt a baby. Close supervision is mandatory whenever an infant/toddler and a pet are together.

Matt and Ruth are happy to report that Lily loves Jameson and gets along with him very well



Ruth has also said that Lily sometimes takes on a bossy parenting role when Jameson is crying by looking at Ruth and Matt as if to say "Are you going to do something about this"



We hope this is of some help and if you need to discuss any of these issues further please feel free to give us a call at the hospital.