



DOG TRAINING SOLUTIONS

18 June 2008

Re: Babies & Dogs – a Warning

It was with great distress that we heard on the 28th December 2007 on both radio and TV news that a 9-week old baby was mauled by one of the family pet Rottweilers.

In the Age newspaper article the following day they interviewed neighbours. The article dramatises talk about raised fences etc –adding to the tragedy, with the husband being in hospital for a brain tumour at the time of the incident. When reading the comments of the president of Rottweilers Council of Australia he reiterates that people need to take care with dogs and their kids – especially newborns.

It is a little like a family with *one* child, where they are expecting the *second* child. The parents would make a real effort to ensure that the first born child embraces the coming family addition, rather than feel threatened by it and possibly even reject it and/or see it as unwanted. They would do this by getting the first born involved where possible, communicate with them, have them touch mum's tummy and feel the baby, and when the second child is born the first born is not neglected but involved.

I cannot stress the importance to do the same with a dog (or dogs) that were your 'first born' and had you and your partner to themselves. So why would they want to share and give things up? Why should they accept number 2. Obviously the baby will need and demand a lot of attention, so what about Rover?? Less walks, less cuddles, less attention. Visitors now come to see the baby – not Rover. The baby gets fed multiple times a day, and Rover is lucky not to be forgotten. I am sure that you get the scenario of how Rover feels about all this. After all you never asked Rover about their thoughts of the addition. And a dog will try and protect what it has got – territory and rights and status. Anything that interferes with that is seen as a threat. The more and the longer this has been the case the more risk there is. This risk is *potentially* further enhanced by certain breeds.

So please, make it a **golden rule** that as soon as people are expecting, the training of Rover commences. I have had clients walk empty prams, so the dogs are used to the pram. They learn to sit at the door till the pram is in – and then follow, so mum does not break her neck when trying to look after baby, pram and dog(s). They walk on the left hand side next to the pram. Clients are being advised to let the dog look and smell into the pram, well before the baby arrives (but maybe use a doll dressed in clothes your future child will be wearing. Use lots of baby powder smell – put some on the dog's bed, so the smell transfers to the dog. If it is your first baby, ask friends to record a crying session of a young baby or use your own recording – so the dog gets used to the noise. The same applies to things like baby baths, smells etc – prepare your dog(s). Use baby gates to secure areas where the dog is allowed to be when the baby arrives and areas where it is out of bounds so the dog is used to that routine before the baby comes home.

Always bring the baby home in a safe manner (dogs are outside and/or in an enclosed area) – and when the baby is settled bring the baby out into the most neutral environment of the house, eg the front garden (if never used for the dog), and have the dog *on* the leash. Introduce them slowly and be alert. *A smell is enough* for starters, and let the dog get used to the smells and see that there is no threat before you proceed any further with introductions. Do things as you have done before, slower and slightly more observant of the dog. Try and compensate and have ‘private time’ with the dog eg whilst the baby is sleeping. Slowly the dog will become more accepting and fall into the new routine. Please ensure that the dog has its own enclosed sleeping quarters and in NOT in the master bedroom – especially if that is where the baby is kept. Collar on the dog is a must at all times, but where appropriate use a very short leash to have permanently on the dog for control until things have settled (and take your time with that).

Another **golden rule** should be NEVER EVER leave a dog (regardless of breed, sex, age or size) alone with any child, but especially a newborn. I hope that the above explanation makes sense and ensures that you implement the two **golden rules** and I would feel very confident that we see less of these horror stories that scar people for life and punish a dog that was a great canine.

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