

Preparing Your Cat for a New Baby

All cats will benefit from some preparation before a new baby's arrival, but those who are nervous, skittish or needy require extra consideration. Cats are creatures of habit and tend to prefer consistency. They're easily upset by abrupt changes in their routine or environment. If your cat didn't grow up in a household with young children, he might have an especially hard time adjusting to a new baby because the baby's appearance, loud, strange sounds and strong smells will be unfamiliar—and maybe even frightening. It's best to start getting Kitty ready long before your new baby makes her debut. However, if that opportunity has already passed and your baby will arrive soon, don't worry. It's not too late to pave the way for peace in the family.

GETTING YOUR CAT READY

When preparing your cat for the baby's arrival, it's important to focus on two main things:

1. Gradually introducing your cat to the new experiences, schedules, sights, sounds and smells he'll encounter when the baby comes
2. Associating all of those new things with rewards so they don't upset him

KEEP A CONSISTENT SCHEDULE

Your schedule will become very chaotic when the baby arrives. Decide now when you'll be able to consistently feed your cat, scoop his litter box and give him some one-on-one attention and play. Start to gradually shift your cat's schedule so that he's already used to it when the baby comes. If necessary, buy an automatic feeder with a timer, such as the Super Feeder® or the Furry Feeder™, in order to keep regular, predictable feeding times.

MINIMIZE CHANGES IN ATTENTION

Resist the temptation to give your cat extra attention in the weeks before the baby's due date. This will only set him up for a bigger letdown when the baby comes and he suddenly gets less of your attention. It's much better to start shifting kitty cuddling and play to set times that your cat can look forward to and gradually give him less and less attention at other times of day. This will ease your cat into a schedule that you'll probably be able to maintain once the baby comes.

THE BABY'S ROOM

Decide now if you will or won't allow your cat into the baby's room. Everyone in the family should agree on this rule and stick to it.

If the Baby's Room Will Be Off-Limits

Move any furniture your cat loves to sit on out of the baby's room so he can still have access to it when the baby comes. Keep the baby's door closed or install a very tall baby gate in the doorway to get your cat used to restricted access now. Set up a comfy cat bed or cat tree just outside the door. Keep a canister of cat treats in the baby's room. Every time you enter when you rock or feed her, occasionally toss a treat into the cat bed. This practice will make your cat happy to be around the baby while rewarding him for staying out of the room. If he tries to sneak into the baby's room, just gently remove him. Don't punish or scold him, as this might make him fearful or aggressive toward you or the baby.

Before the baby arrives, balance a few empty soda cans filled with pennies on the rim of the crib. If your cat tries to jump in, the noisy result will discourage future visits. Also, place a cat bed or cat tree inside the baby's room. Use the treat-in the bed technique described above to reward your cat for being near the baby yet out of your way.

PREPARE FOR BABY SIGHTS, SOUNDS AND SMELLS

Baby Toys and Supplies

All the new baby things coming into the house will smell strange or even scary to your cat. Unwrap baby toys and supplies from packaging and introduce them to your cat one or two at a time. Place new baby items several feet from your cat's food bowl and leave them there for a few days. This way, your cat will experience them in a low-key situation and will be rewarded with his food for approaching the new things. You can also start to use a little bit of the baby's lotions, shampoos and creams on yourself so your cat associates them with a familiar person.

The Baby

To some cats, babies seem like aliens from outer space. They smell, sound, look and act differently than adult humans. So buy a CD of baby sounds, available from amazon.com or dogwise.com, and play it during your cat's meals and when you snuggle or play with him. At first, play the sounds at a very low volume. As long as your cat remains comfortable with the sounds, you can gradually increase the volume over a couple of weeks until you've worked up to a realistic level of

noise. To help your cat get used to childlike movements, spend some time each day crawling around and lying on the floor, running through the house and playing with baby toys. Be ready to praise or toss your cat a treat if he comes near, but if he chooses to keep a distance instead, that's okay. Don't force him to approach.

Start getting your cat used to the baby's prodding fingers now by playing Poke the Kitty. Very gently give your cat a little poke, pat or pinch. Then immediately give him a yummy treat or his dinner. Play this game at least two or three times a day until the baby arrives.

Once the baby comes, help your cat to enjoy being around her. Offer lots of praise, treats or play whenever he comes anywhere near the baby, but don't force him to approach. Stop the praise and rewards whenever your cat walks away from the baby—but do continue to have scheduled cuddling and playtime with him.

WHEN GUESTS VISIT

A new baby means frequent visits from friends and family. Nervous cats will prefer to stay in a quiet room with the door closed when guests arrive. During visits, periodically check on your cat and offer treats or a few minutes of play. If he seems anxious, let him stay in the quiet retreat until your guests leave. Make sure your cat has access to food, water, something comfortable to rest on and a litter box while he's in the quiet room.

ADDITIONAL TIPS

- Create several kitty perches around your house, up high and out of a toddler's reach, where your cat can retreat if he wants to.
- Move your cat's litter boxes to quiet, private spots that are inaccessible to a baby or toddler, but not so far out of the way that your cat won't want to use them. Try placing one of the boxes in a cabinet or closet with a hole cut in the door.
- If you're concerned about your cat scratching the baby, try using nail caps, such as Soft Claws®, as a safe, non-surgical alternative to declawing.
- Neutering can help cats react less to things, so having your male cat neutered at least a few months before the baby arrives might help him adjust to her more easily.
- It's a myth that cats try to smother babies. If you see your cat peacefully sniffing your baby's face, praise him for such nice, calm behavior around her!
- Any sudden change in your cat's behavior might indicate an underlying medical condition. If your cat's behavior changes during preparation for your baby's arrival or after the baby comes, see your veterinarian right away to rule out sickness and injury—especially if you notice any unusual physical symptoms or if your cat stops eating.

Source:

- ASPCA: <http://www.asPCA.org/Pet-care/virtual-pet-behaviorist/cat-articles/preparing-your-cat-for-a-new-baby>