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Dear Trudi,

We have a 3 year old mini schnauzer called Fritz, who up until now has been our baby. He sleeps on our bed, curls up with us on the couch, follows me EVERYWHERE and just generally does whatever he pleases inside and outside of the house. The thing is that I have just found out that I'm pregnant and all of a sudden, Fritz is going to become number 2! I am wondering how this is going to impact Fritz and what sort of things I need to change (if anything) in anticipation of our baby's arrival.

I'd really love your advice,

Louise

Hi Louise

There is going to be some major changes in both yours and Fritz's world and preparation is essential before your baby is born! You have 9 months to prepare, so now is the time to get started. We expect kids and dogs to get along but once you try living under the same roof, you know the truth, living with kids and dogs in the same house is not always easy. Parenting books say "control your dog" and dog training books say "control your kids". The reality is far more complex! You need to consider what kind of changes need to be made and make a start on modifying things now. Basic training is a must! Preparing Fritz for the new arrival can be made more difficult if he doesn't have the basic skills. Before you can implement the tools and strategies specific to the integration of the new family member, Fritz must be able to sit, drop, stay and come proficiently. If he doesn't do these, go back to basics and get these basic requests up to scratch.

You say that he sleeps on the bed and curls up with you on the couch - is that going to be appropriate once the baby is home? Will the baby be in bed with you or will you be nursing the baby on the couch and if so, will Fritz be interfering by being right there with you? These are the types of things that you need to consider. Be fair to Fritz. His world is about to change in a big way so focus on him now, so that you can focus on baby when you need to. Don't leave changes to chance, it is important to make any changes prior to the baby arriving so that he doesn't associate negative changes with the baby. Consider what you think the new schedule maybe like and make this your new routine. Make any changes NOW - If you are planning on getting a dog walker, get one now, if you know you can only walk in the evenings, do so now. Move his bed to the new location and start using baby gates from time to time to block him in and out of rooms. Dogs are creatures of habit; he'll need to learn to get used to the changes.

Get to know his body language and the precursory signs to how he is feeling in any situation. Body language will tell you a lot about how and why Fritz is behaving the way that he is. It also gives you the opportunity to take action if necessary. Several weeks prior to the baby being born, reduce the attention

you are giving him. Realistically it is going to be hard to give him the same amount of attention once the baby arrives and you don't want him to associate the baby with the lack of attention. Once the baby does arrive, do make some special time for him and he will associate the slight increase in attention with the baby's arrival.

Let Fritz explore the nursery and become familiar with the smells such as baby powder and lotions. This will decrease his curiosity level. If you decide this area is out of bounds, once he has had the opportunity to be familiar, then teach him NOT to go into this room, or install a baby gate. You don't want to bar him once the baby arrives and possibly create a negative association with the new arrival.

Think about the logistics of the pram, the layout of your house and walking Fritz. Can you manoeuvre the pram around easily with one hand with a dog in the other? How does Fritz walk on lead? Does he trot along nicely beside you or is he a serial puller? Once you get your pram, it's a good idea to take it out on a walk with Fritz to get a feel of just how it is going to go and what if anything you will need to modify, eg. he may be scared to be so close to the pram.

Outside of these things, try to introduce Fritz to as many children of different ages as possible. This needs to be done safely. He should be kept on lead at all times and introduced slowly to calm children. Children should be advised not to run away or scream or be too full on when meeting Him. Have children calmly pat him under the chin (not on top of the head) and give him treats so that children become a positive association. Both dog and child should be supervised at all times. Don't force him into doing anything that he's not comfortable with.

The actual relationship between your baby and Fritz will grow over time and the best way to make sure this bond develops into something healthy and happy is to make sure that good things happen for him when the baby is around. Ensure at some stage daily that you have "Fritz time". This is where he gets your full attention, rub of the tummy, grooming, playing with toys etc... Remember he was your first baby and still needs to feel important.



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