

Surrender Prevention Workshop Handout: Cat & New Baby

From the cat's point of view:

Abrupt changes

Unfamiliar sounds and smells

Intermittent noise (wailing/crying) is stressful.

Total shift in the cat's normal routine.

New furniture/paraphernalia

Numerous visits from family and friends

More deliveries

Cat never knows what is going to happen from one moment to the next

Remember: from the cat's point of view, the new baby happens without any warning. Many people incorrectly assume any negative behavior a cat displays toward the new baby is based on jealousy but that's not true. It's really confusion.

To help before the baby:

Sprinkle baby powder, baby oil or lotions you will be using on your skin so your cat becomes familiar with the new smells in a non-threatening way

Set up the baby's room and physical space of the home as it will be when the baby arrives, including cribs, strollers, baby swings, changing table. Allow your cat to investigate, smell and scent deposit.

Have a cozy and inviting room for your cat that is off limits to the baby and unknown visitors.

Create vertical space, hiding spaces and high resting napping spots. You don't need to spend a lot of money on cat trees. A blanket or towel placed on a desk, shelf, bureau or other piece of furniture that the cat has easy access to can be repurposed as vertical space.

Create a schedule that includes the daily routines of your cat—feeding time, playtime, petting time—that will be in place once the baby comes home

Once the baby is home:

Play the radio softly so your cat isn't hearing excited voices and crying

Bring out a couple of new toys, ones that were not in her rotation, for her to enjoy.

Be aware of your body language and nonverbal signals. If you are fearful about your cat being too close or hurting the baby, your body language or tone may be creating anxiety in her. If she attempted to get close and you shooed her away or pushed her off the couch, your cat may view the baby as a negative change in her life.

Allow your cat to set the pace of the introduction and be in control of whether or not she wants to interact with the baby. Let your cat hide or retreat when she wants to. Don't pick up the cat and bring her over to the baby and don't carry your baby directly into your cat's space. Rather, follow your cat's lead.

Allow your cat to spend time with the baby with your supervision. If you are holding the baby, and your cat wants to be with you, let your cat sit or nap next to you. But allow your cat to set the pace of the introduction and be in control of whether she wants to interact with the baby. Your cat may stay away from the baby at first, and it is ok to let her hide or go to her safe room. The more your cat feels in control of the situation, the less stressed and fearful she will be. In these matters, it is always best to go at the cat's pace.

When your cat is ready to be near the baby, keep the interactions brief and positive at first. Give your cat something she loves—treats/food, playtime, grooming. Create positive associations by doing interactive play sessions with a fishing pole type/wand toy with your cat in the baby's room, and in other areas of the home with the baby in the room. Make sure your cat gets a regular schedule of interactive play, as much in proximity to the baby as possible.

Your cat also needs one-on-one time with you, so provide affection and playtime when the baby is napping. Your cat needs to know that not everything in her life has been turned upside down. At least once or twice a day engage your cat in interactive play with a fishing pole/wand type toy. This playtime will help to reduce your cat's stress levels and will also make sure her need for stimulation is being met. Playing with your cat near the baby—if the cat is comfortable with this—will also create positive associations.

If your cat wants to be with you to sit next to the baby, follow your cat's lead and then reward your cat with treats for appropriate behavior. You want your cat to view the baby as a positive experience. Don't force interactions but gently and positively facilitate naturally occurring interactions when your cat is interested, calm and naturally curious.

Set up interactive activity toys, especially puzzle feeders, so your cat plays more during the day and has the feeling of a satisfying capture followed by the rewarding eating of his caught prey (the doled-out food). Environmental enrichment plays an important role in keeping your cat active and using her brain in a way that focuses on accomplishing a task than falling victim to stress, anxiety and fear.

Final Thought:

Your cat and baby should never be alone until your child is past the toddler stage and you are sure that your cat is comfortable with your child and that your child is comfortable around your cat and understands appropriate behavior with the cat.