

# **You Can Keep Your PET AND Your BABY!**

Every year, myths and negative information frighten expectant parents into surrendering thousands of pets to local animal shelters. But giving away your animal friend is NOT a necessary precaution! Pet guardianship has many benefits that are immeasurable in terms of companionship and love. Preparing a dog or cat for the addition of a baby in advance enables you not only to keep your animal companions but provide your child with a loyal, loving friend.

## **Before Baby Arrives**

Follow these steps to decrease stress levels for you and your pet!

- Your new baby will demand a lot of time and energy, so gradually accustom your pet to spending less time with you. If possible, delegate pet care to another member of the household so she won't feel neglected once the baby arrives.
- Keep changes to your pet's routine and living area as minimal as possible. Big changes, such as redecorating a room, should be done early so he has time to adjust to the new surroundings. Let him sniff the crib, baby bath, etc., but teach your cat not to get inside them. (Place double-sided sticky tape or balloons inside the crib to deter your cat. When baby comes home, you can also put a light mesh tenting over the crib if you are concerned.)
- Establish spatial boundaries for your pet in and around the baby areas. If you do not want the dog in the nursery, a baby gate will still allow her to see what is going on and feel less isolated.
- Let your pets get used to the new smells of a baby by using powders, lotions and shampoos on yourself before baby arrives.
- Swaddle a blanket and let your pet sit quietly next to you.
- Accustom your pet to the sounds of a baby. Play a recording of a baby crying (start with the sound very low, then increase the volume gradually as he becomes more comfortable with it). Reinforce the sounds with tasty treats and praise.
- If this is your first baby, let your pet become acquainted with other children prior to the new arrival. Always closely supervise all interactions.

## **Bringing Baby Home**

Life will no doubt be hectic caring for your new baby. Here are some steps you can take to make sure your companion animal readily accepts the new baby.

- Always supervise any interactions between your baby and your pet. Never leave them unattended, and do not allow your pet to sleep with your baby.
- Never force close, physical contact between your baby and your pet. Allow your dog or cat to approach and investigate at his or her own pace.
- Spend time with your pet and your baby together. Talk to your animal friend as you feed or change diapers. This will reassure her that she is still part of your life and that the baby is now part of her life. If she is made to feel part of the baby-raising activities, she will be more accepting of the noisy "intruder."
- Use positive reinforcement (small food treats, a calm, happy voice) to reward your pet when interacting with your baby. You want all interactions to be pleasant experiences for your pet. The worst thing you can do is create negative associations between the two!
- Make sure your animal companion has a place to go that is quiet and secluded. It will give him a spot to rest from all the excitement.
- When friends and family visit the new baby, encourage them to pay attention to your animal companion as well.

- Be sure to set aside special time every day to spend with your animal friend. It will help relax you, too!

**For more information on raising your animal companions and baby together, please call the HSBC Education Department at (954) 266-6875.**

## **What About Toxoplasmosis?**

Being pregnant does NOT mean you have to give up living with and caring for your beloved cat. Pregnant women have all heard horror stories of toxoplasmosis. However, it is a rare, easily avoidable disease in the United States. While the disease-causing parasite can be found in the feces of cats who ingest raw meat, birds, mice, or contaminated soil, toxoplasmosis is more commonly found in uncooked or undercooked meat and unpasteurized dairy products. If a woman is exposed to this protozoan while pregnant, it could put her unborn child at risk.

The fact is most people and cats have already been exposed to this disease and once exposed become immune. There are very few cases of prenatal toxoplasmosis documented that have ever been caused by a cat.

### **Taking Precautions:**

There is absolutely NO REASON to give up your furry friend as long as you take precautions. By practicing good hygiene and responsible pet care, you can keep you, your baby and your cat healthy.

- Keep your cat indoors; cats usually get this protozoan through ingesting mice and birds. If he's inside, you won't have to worry!
- Feed your cat commercially produced cat food.
- Either hand over litter box duty to your hubby or other family member or wear rubber gloves when cleaning the box. (A cat's stool does not become infective in the litter box for 24 hours, so clean the box daily and eliminate any possibility!)
- If you work outdoors in soil, always wear gloves and wash your hands afterwards.
- Cook meat at 150 degrees Fahrenheit and wash hands after handling raw meat.