

## COLORADO CRITTERS

# Be smart: Prepare Bowser for the blessed event

By Rebecca Jones

ROCKY MOUNTAIN NEWS

Gretta and Ravi Hunjan, of Denver, are making all the necessary preparations for the arrival of their new baby in a few weeks, but mixed with their joy is a real concern for how 2½-year-old Zoey will respond.

"Zoey is our first 'child,' and she's completely the center of our attention," Gretta says. "We can't explain to her what's happening, and we're worried she'll feel jealous and neglected and may even try to hurt the baby somehow."

Zoey is a dog, a Lab mix that, Gretta says, "needs a lot of attention."

Such concern is neither unusual nor misplaced. Many dogs serve as surrogate children, and just as wise parents take steps to prepare older children for the arrival of a new sibling, so do they take steps to prepare the family pet as well.

Animal behaviorist Kari Bastyr, owner of Wag & Train, leads regular classes, called "When Barkley Meets Baby," for expectant parents. She guides the soon-to-be parents and their dogs through several exercises and gives them lots of time-tested tips for making the transition smooth for everyone involved.

"I know of several dogs who were taken to a shelter when the baby came," Bastyr says. "That's really sad. There are enough dogs in shelters as it is. There's no reason it has to come to that."

New parents often make the mistake of shooing the dog away whenever the baby is around. That's the worst thing they can do, Bastyr says.

"I can't emphasize this enough. You want your dog to associate the baby with good things," she says. "Don't put the dog out when the ba-



ELLEN JASKOL/ROCKYMOUNTAINNEWS

**Crystal Windley** holds her baby, Ayla, 3 1/2 months old, as their dog, Tabor, kisses her on the cheek.

by gets up from its nap. Dogs need to have lots of positive experiences with the baby, and they need to be around the baby a lot."

Good dog/baby relations start before the baby is born, Bastyr says. "Work on obedience so the dog's skills will be sharpened once the baby comes," she says. "It's a good idea to work on 'Stay' and 'Come' especially, or take a class if your dog hasn't learned the basics."

She also advises expectant parents to practice doing with a doll the

things they'll eventually do with a baby, to get the dog used to it. Let the dog learn to walk politely alongside the stroller. Put a car seat in the car and take the dog for a drive, so the dog doesn't suddenly have its favorite perch usurped by the baby.

She also suggests playing a recording of baby sounds to help acclimate the dog. "When a baby comes there will be a lot of new sounds they haven't heard before," Bastyr says. "Especially screaming. They may mistake the baby's screams for a dis-

tress cry, which could make them engage in some predatory behavior."

Once the baby is born, bring home something with the baby's and mom's scent, Bastyr advises. Let the dog sniff it, and give him a treat.

When mom comes home from the hospital, Bastyr advises greeting the dog first, without the baby. After five to 10 minutes, bring the baby in and give the dog lots of praise and treats. "Then let the dog sniff and lick the baby's feet to get that first little taste," she says. "They'll be curious."

### Class information

- **What:** Barkley Meets Baby
- **When:** 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., Nov. 22
- **Where:** City Bark & Meow, 370 Kalamath St.
- **Cost:** \$35
- **Information:** 720-312-5499 or [www.wagandtrain.com](http://www.wagandtrain.com)

But never, ever leave even the best-behaved dog alone with a baby even for a few seconds, she warns.

Finally, there's the issue of the diapers. There's no polite way to say this, but just remember to keep the diaper pail secure and tightly locked at all times, lest your dog be tempted to help himself to a tasty treat. That's not just disgusting, it's also possibly harmful to the dog, as he could choke and possibly suffocate on a disposable diaper.

Crystal Windley of Denver will testify to the effectiveness of pre-baby preparation. Her daughter, Ayla, was born in June, and in May she enrolled with her black Lab puppy, Tabor, in one of Bastyr's classes.

"Tabor was, at that time, 9 months old, and he was really energetic, he wouldn't listen. He was really a handful," Windley says. "But we introduced him to the baby just like Kari taught us, and he didn't even care, which was shocking. He wanted to sniff her. We let him lick her. We let him know she was not his, she was hands-off."

"Now I think they'll have a really good relationship," Windley says. "What's more, he was never protective of the house before, but since the baby has arrived, Tabor's started barking at strangers."