



## Things Change When Your Baby Learns to Crawl

You read all the books about introducing your new baby to the family dog. You played a CD of noises to help Scooter become accustomed to the sounds Isabella would make. You brought home a blanket from the hospital for him to smell before the baby came home. You covered all of your bases . . . so why, seven months later, is Scooter acting so strangely?

Your baby has started to crawl. Scooter didn't expect that. Isabella's newfound mobility can upset and confuse Scooter. Now Isabella is investigating areas he once thought were his. And she's approaching him on her own terms rather than waiting for him to come to her.

If your dog is going to have problems with your baby, the crawling stage is typically where you see the first significant signs. A few questions to consider . . . Does Scooter happily approach you when you are sitting on the couch and holding Isabella? Does he stay just out of arms' reach or snuggle in close? Does he seem interested in her activity or a bit nervous about it?



**More Management.** It's time to pull out those baby gates and put them to use. When Isabella is exploring all the nooks and crannies of the living room, let her do so without Scooter's supervision. Many dogs are protective of things they consider their own. Scooter's toys are an obvious example, but Scooter may feel that the corner where his cushioned bed is belongs to him and him alone. He may be uncomfortable with Isabella crawling on it. Until you are certain that Scooter is comfortable with all of Isabella's explorations, give them each some space in the early stages.

**Escape Routes.** Many dogs are fine as long as the baby isn't pursuing them. But week by week, Isabella is picking up speed, and one of her primary interests is likely to be Scooter. This is fine as long as you make sure that Scooter always has a way to get away from her when he's had enough. Be sure that she cannot pin him into a corner; you never want your dog to choose the "fight" half of the "fight-or-flight" stress response.

**Gentle Touching.** Isabella is not old enough to truly understand that she needs to be gentle to Scooter (or anyone else for that matter), but that doesn't mean that you shouldn't be trying to teach her. If Scooter is happy to sit beside you and Isabella, take her hand and gently stroke his fur. Be careful to avoid his eyes and ears. It's usually best for children to pet dogs on their sides and backs.

Also, no matter how conscientious you are, little children are prone to having sticky fingers. It's quite easy for Isabella to accidentally pull Scooter's fur because her hands naturally grasp and the stickiness can trap some of his fur.

**Don't Force Contact.** You know that Isabella is trying to be friendly when she's approaching Scooter. In most cases, he'll know that too. Dogs as a species are remarkably perceptive and accommodating of human behavior. But if Scooter has any concerns, the worst thing you can do is hold him still and allow Isabella to pet him. Unfortunately many parents do exactly that. They feel that by holding the dog, they are conveying to him that he is safe and that Isabella is being friendly. In all likelihood, the dog is learning the exact opposite; he's learning that he is sometimes caught, restrained, and forced to endure contact that he perceives as scary. This treatment will usually result in a dog that is more likely to avoid your child, not less.

**Set Up Some Fun Interactions.** The easiest way to help a dog like kids is to have good things happen when kids are around. That sounds simple enough, but often your child needs so much of your attention that the dog gets



left behind. Then when Isabella is asleep, you play with Scooter and give him lots of attention. With a little advance planning, you can do both.

**Teach Scooter the names of some of his toys.** Then when you are caring for Isabella, you can send him searching for the special toys. Toss the toy down the stairs and let him run after it.

You can also stuff a few chew toys (such as Kongs or Everlasting Fun Balls) and keep them handy to give to Scooter when you are playing with Isabella. Then he'll be nearby enjoying a special treat and associating it with her presence. This is a very simple, yet powerful, concept.

And keep in mind that as Isabella learns to fling food from her highchair tray, Scooter is as enchanted with her newfound skill as you are . . . but for a completely different reason. Dogs make a great kitchen cleanup crew.

Kids and dogs can be wonderful friends, but it is important for us as parents to orchestrate their interactions in such a way that they always see each other in the best light. Keep a careful eye on Isabella and Scooter and look for ways to help them enjoy spending time together. You'll be glad you did.