

Babies & Dogs: Teaching “What Happened?”

You have a baby on the way. Congratulations!

We know you have a million things to prepare before your little bundle arrives. Your dog is probably not on the very top of your list. However, if you only have time to teach your dog one thing, this is it. This exercise is aimed to accident proof your dog for those moments when the toddler-to-be will step over your dog’s comfort zone.

Charging the cue:

- Say “What happened?” in a cheerful way – like you would say it to a small child. Follow with offering a treat to your dog. Be careful to say the phrase *before* you pull the treat out of your pocket. We want the phrase to become the predictor of a treat. However, dogs (like children) tend to stop listening when they are focused on treats.
- Over the next few days practice this game in different areas of the house at different times. Play it in every room and with all people old enough to do so. Do this in sets of 5-10 repetitions.
- You will notice that your dog is ready for the next step when you can say “What happened?” and your dog reacts by happily and expectantly looking at you.

Start an association with “weird moments”:

- Start by making slightly weird things happen. By that we mean mildly odd or out of place occurrences like dropping small items, bumping a chair, pretending to fall, singing loudly, and so on. Do not startle or scare your dog!
- When you make these moments happen, say “What happened?” and follow with a treat. You can also use unplanned incidents that happen. Say “What happened?” and then race to get your dog something yummy.
- The idea here is to make the association that weird moments could mean treats for your dog and are therefore not to be feared.
- Practice this over several days and several times daily. Take a couple of weeks on this if you can. Don’t forget to move around the house and take turns while playing this game.
- You will notice that your dog is ready for the next step when you do something odd and your dog looks at you happily and expectantly.

Make the connection with the baby:

- Once the baby is home, start associating all kind of things that the baby does with the “What happened?” prompt and treats. You can use moments like the baby crying, or the baby kicking his legs, or the baby dropping a pacifier or toy.
- Whenever such small things happen you say “What happened?” and offer a treat. You may want to cut up very small treats for this since you are going to be using a lot of them.
- A word of warning though – you may notice soon that your dog starts following you around whenever you have the baby and won’t leave your side because she is waiting for the inevitable treat. We strongly encourage you to also start reinforcing things like sitting or lying down and staying a few feet away at this point. We do not want your dog to be glued to your baby. We are trying to keep it at friendly indifference or vague interest. If you need help getting your dog to relax or teaching your dog a stay, please let us know.
- When your infant gets a little older and his movements become more intentional, you can start reserving your “What happened?” prompt and treats for more dramatic things the baby does. Examples for this stage might be throwing toys, dropping bottles, rolling over, or loud crying/laughing.
- As your toddler gets older keep using the “What happened?” prompt whenever there is an accidental scare or impolite movement from your toddler towards the dog.



The payoff for this exercise will come when your toddler becomes truly mobile. All too often we get reports of small children being bitten because they fell on the dog or acted inappropriately towards the dog in some unexpected way.

Children and their unpredictability are inherently scary for dogs. This exercise, however, provides you with a tool to help your dog through this rough time in a child's life.

Please understand that this exercise is not meant to remove your responsibility to actively and proactively supervise the interactions between your dog and child. It is simply meant to offer an additional safe guard for accidents.

Excerpted from "Got a "Get Out of Bite Free" Card?" By Madeline Gabriel, posted on May 19th, 2016 in Dog Bite Prevention, Life With Dog and Baby.

The full blog post can be found at <http://www.dogsandbabieslearning.com/2016/05/19/got-a-get-out-of-bite-free-card/>