

BABIES, TODDLERS, SMALL CHILDREN

As your baby grows and develops, they'll begin to have their own interactions with the family cat. Make sure your cat has their own sanctuary space to escape to when your child starts exploring. Babies and toddlers should always be supervised around cats as they may try to grasp or pull at the cat's tail or fur. Work with your child to teach them how to gently touch the cat. Mutual respect and careful introductions can grow into a loving bond between your cat and child.

Growing up with animals is a great way to learn empathy; start your child early on their path to becoming a Cat Champion.

KEEP YOUR CATS INDOORS

Many of our rescue cats were discovered outside after having been abandoned or living the rough street life. These cats are ready to enjoy the rest of their lives in indoor comfort. Keeping your cat inside protects them from further dangers and trauma. Outdoor cats are subjected to the dangers of traffic, poisonous substances, injuries from other animals and cruelty from humans, and diseases. By allowing your adopted rescue cat to go outside, chances increase of them getting ill, attacked, or lost.

Keeping your cat indoors will also mitigate the risk of bringing viruses and germs into the home, especially important with babies and during pregnancy.

Action Volunteers for Animals (AVA) is an all-volunteer-run charitable animal rescue dedicated to helping stray and feral animals live healthy and happy lives.

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Cats and Babies You Can Have Both!



The information provided here is designed to help you prepare and welcome your new feline companion into your home and life

Having a baby is a major life change, for you and your cat. Often the cat has been the “baby” of the house and, while not much needs to change for them, there will be noticeable differences around the home — new parts of the house being off-limits, for example — that will require some adjustment. It’s a common misconception that cats and babies don’t mix – cats often end up in animal shelters before the family’s baby arrives. There may be concerns that the cat might attack or hurt the infant, or that the baby might be allergic. However, with the proper preparation, your cat and your baby can live in harmony.

PREPARATION FOR THE NEW BABY

Think integration not separation.

It’s important to know that cats are territorial, but they’re also social. They want to be where their humans are and to feel included. By sharing space where everyone can see (and smell) each other, you’ll have the best chance of positive cat behaviour and a good relationship between cat and baby.

Here are the top five ways that you can prepare before baby arrives:

- **“Scent soakers”**
Gather objects that have the cat’s scent on them, such as cat beds or your cat’s favourite blanket. Bring them to the nursery, along with baby-scented objects (diapers, baby powder, etc.) so their scents can start mingling. Let the cat sniff and explore the new objects in his/her own time. This will start to train the cat to the new smells that are coming.
- **Cat stuff**
Give the cat their own cat tree or other high, comfortable space in the nursery. This gives the cat ownership of something in the room so they have confidence and can watch the activity in the room from a safe spot. They will be included in the process without being in the crib, which can be understandably uncomfortable. Ensure the cat always has an “escape route” so they can leave if the sights and sounds are too much.
- **Mealtime in the nursery**
Before the baby comes, have the cat’s mealtime in the nursery. Pretend to feed your baby (using a doll, for example) at the same time as the cat. This creates a positive association with the room, the baby, and you.
- **Desensitizing to sounds**
Begin to introduce your cat to typical baby sounds. Start with video or audio of gentle, happy sounds, always starting at a low volume. Gradually increase the volume and types of sounds, like crying, over the course of a week, for example. Do positive things with the cat, like interactive play or giving them treats, while the sounds are happening, which serves as a distraction and also as positive reinforcement.
- **Playtime**
Before baby comes, play with your cat in the nursery so they develop a positive association with that room and, consequently, your new baby when they arrive. Don’t forget to play with them after baby arrives too; it’s better — and safer — to expend and direct their energy in positive ways. Always reward good behaviour!

HEALTH AND SAFETY PRECAUTIONS

Here are a safety few tips to incorporate into your routine:

- Get information from your doctor and your vet about cat-borne organisms that can harm unborn babies and take appropriate precautions.
- Toxoplasmosis can harm an unborn baby, but cats are not the sole source of toxoplasmosis. Use rubber gloves and common sense about hygiene when cleaning out litter trays (if this task is unavoidable).
- Take care to keep up with your cat’s grooming — trim their nails and brush their coats regularly.
- Always wash your hands after handling the cat and after scooping/cleaning their litter boxes.
- Stay current with your cat’s preventative health care — make sure they’re up-to-date on vaccines, as well as flea and worm treatments.
- Keep your cat off kitchen surfaces.
- Use safety netting over your baby’s crib or pram to prevent the cat from exploring or napping unsupervised.
- Once the newborn arrives, make sure the nursery is off-limits to the cat when unsupervised and overnight.
- Keep your cat’s feeding area and litter box away from where you’ll be preparing your baby’s meals.
- Consider using a covered litter box to reduce odours and litter scattering.
- Wipe up any spills from baby food to prevent your cat from “helping” to clean up. Keep cat food and baby food separated to prevent cross-contamination.
- When your baby is mobile, make sure the cat’s litter box and feeding area are out of the crawling path.

AFTER THE BABY’S ARRIVAL

Understandably, you’re excited to introduce the members of your family to each other as soon as possible. Instead, exercise a little a patience and use a sense-by-sense introduction — the procedure of introducing your cat to the new baby one sense at a time — to reduce the stress of this new situation.

- **Introduction by scent**
Cats communicate with scent and identify friends as smelling similar to them. Before showing the baby to the cat, allow your cat to smell an item the baby has worn or the blanket they were swaddled in and monitor their reaction.
- **Do some scent swapping with a Sock Exchange**
Just as you mingled the cat’s scent with the nursery, you’ll want to mingle the scents of your cat and baby. Gently rub one of your baby’s socks along each side of the cat’s face to pick up their facial pheromones, then have your baby wear the socks. The more the cat recognizes their “group scent” the less of a threat they’ll feel.
- **Let them look, but not touch**
Allow the cat to see the baby from a safe distance, for a few minutes at first, then gradually extend their exposure time. Reward your cat for good behaviour (no hissing or growling near baby), to build a positive association.