

## How to Prepare Your Cat for a New Baby



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You're expecting a baby - congratulations! While the rest of your family is thrilled, you might not be sure how your feline fur baby will react to the addition of a new family member. Babies come with new smells and noises but also with a drastic change in your, and your cat's, daily routine. Here are some tips to help the transition go a little more smoothly.

Many cats may become stressed with sudden changes to their previously stable environment so make changes gradually. However, before making any of these changes, consider the use of Feliway. Feliway is a synthetic version of cats' "happy" pheromones. A Feliway diffuser or two in your home can help your cats feel more comfortable and less anxious about any changes or stressors in their environment.

Introduce new furniture and other baby-related items in small stages, rather than all at once if possible, to allow your cat time to adjust. Allow your kitty to explore these objects and get comfortable with them before introducing more items. Decide ahead of time what the new house rules are (if your cat will be allowed in the baby's room or continue sleeping in bed with you) and implement these changes well before the baby arrives.

Acclimate your cat to the new noises and sounds that will come along with your new baby so they won't be quite so startled when they first hear them. This includes crying and other baby noises but can also include sounds and/or music that infant toys will make. Use recordings and start by playing them at a very low volume (low enough that your cat doesn't react initially) for short periods. Reward your kitty with treats and attention while they are hearing those sounds. Gradually increase the volume and duration over time, making sure to positively reinforce their calm behavior while the recordings are playing. If your cat becomes nervous or anxious at any point in this process, go back to a lower volume and duration to allow them more time to adjust.



Give your cat a safe space and somewhere to hide. This could include cat trees with hidey holes, or even cardboard boxes in quiet areas. In addition, consider if you need to change the location of your cat's bed and litter boxes and start making them slowly. The litter boxes should generally be in a quiet spot away from busy areas and away from vents or appliances that could startle the cat when they turn on. Make sure to also think about the path your cat has to take to get to the litterbox as you make any changes; you'll want to make sure he or she has easy access to prevent inappropriate urination or defecation.

As it gets closer to the baby's due date, start to plan for their initial interaction. Introduce a blanket or item of clothing that smells like the baby before arriving home so your cat can thoroughly sniff it. Giving your kitty time to expend some energy before the initial introduction can be helpful if your cat tends to be high-energy. Once you arrive home, greet your cat first and wait until he or she settled down to introduce the baby. Being in a quiet room or area with no other distractions can help prevent your cat from getting startled. Keep the first interactions short and sweet, and increase the length and number of interactions over time as long as your cat seems comfortable.

Always directly supervise interactions between your baby and your cat. Your cat could accidentally hurt your baby by not realizing how delicate his human sibling is. In addition, baby behavior could unexpectedly startle or irritate your cat. If your cat seems nervous or anxious when it's time to introduce the baby or at any time during their interactions, do not force him or her to approach or interact. If you are seeing signs of aggression, seek advice from your veterinarian and professional behavioral help from a certified applied animal behaviorist or a board-certified veterinary behaviorist.



If your cat prefers to retreat to a private room or under the bed when your bundle of joy comes home, give them some space and time to adapt. Make sure they have access to fresh food, water, and their litter box if they are not inclined to venture out of their chosen hiding spot right away.

Bringing home a new baby will bring a lot of new and exciting experiences. Some planning ahead of time can help make the adjustment more seamless for all members of your family, your fur baby included. While this is not a comprehensive guide on cats and babies, hopefully these few tips will help you prepare your cat for a smoother introduction to their human sibling.