

PREPARING WESTIE FOR BABY

(And Preparing You for Westie and Baby Together!)

NOTE: This article was written for the Westie Club Website; however, the principles can apply to all breeds. Some breeds (and some individual dogs) are more suited to being around children and may adjust to a baby more easily. However, if you are here, you likely have concerns about your dog. Please substitute your dog's name for "Westie" when reading this material. Article written by Beth Widdows

Most Westie Rescues will tell you that one of the most common reasons for Westies coming into Rescue is CHILDREN!! Either they are not doing well with existing children or a new baby has come into the home and the humans no longer have the time or patience to deal with the new doggie issues that came along with baby. Westies are not recommended for families with kids under the age of ten, people who contemplate having children during the lifespan of their Westie or Grandparents who anticipate frequently visiting grandchildren.

Westies were bred to hunt and kill small critters that screech, squeal, scurry and run. Many times, the normal activities of children can bring out these instincts. Sometimes families find ways to deal with them; often times, they do not. One very common question is, 'How do I prepare my Westie for the new baby?' We are thankful when the question comes BEFORE the baby but sometimes the baby is already there and the question becomes 'How do I correct the problems that have come up since we brought baby home.' What we would really like to hear is, 'I have a brand new puppy and want to make sure it is going to be well-socialized and child friendly. What do I do right now even though I am not even thinking about children at this point.' Remember, when you got your Westie, you made a commitment to love and care for this dog for its entire lifetime. It is now your job to make sure that you find a way to live up to this commitment and that you do it in a way that makes all members of your family happy, including Westie.

The answers aren't perfect. For some Westies and some humans, they just seem to 'have it together' and there never is a big issue. For many, there are issues and it takes work and commitment to find a way to have both kids and Westies together. All we can do is try to give you some ideas of things to try. We can't guarantee results. Each Westie comes with its own set of traits and behaviors; each human has their perception of how much effort they are willing to expend. Each child presents different behaviors that may create some of the issues.

SOCIALIZE, SOCIALIZE, SOCIALIZE

When you get that puppy, ASSUME that it needs to be good with kids even if you don't have kids. It is your duty to your puppy to make it as adaptable as possible, even if you do not anticipate having children. It is a rare situation where a dog will live its lifetime without a need to interact with a child. Not socializing your puppy may increase the odds that it will bite someone someday. It may be put down because of your failures.

Therefore, you **MUST** make sure that puppy is exposed to many people and situations while it is young enough to adapt easily. Start as soon as its shots are completed. Take it with you when you go places, introduce it to neighbors and friends, go to school so it can meet lots of other dogs and other people. If you don't have young kids, go for walks near playgrounds and at strip malls. Keep treats in your pockets for little kids (and adults!) to feed to the puppy. Find ways for puppy to learn that little kids are good. And always, always, always supervise any interactions. Don't take chances on anyone getting hurt by accident (not puppy and not child). And make sure Westie isn't overwhelmed or frightened. If you do all of this when it is just months old, it will be much more effective than if you do it when puppy is a year old. So do it early and do it often!!

Just a note, if you know you will be having children eventually, be very careful about the toys you select for your Westie. Try to give him only toys that are clearly dog toys and would not be confused with baby toys. For instance, don't give him a stuffed bear and then later expect him to not play with baby's stuffed bear.

NEW BABY IS COMING AND WESTIE ISN'T READY

First, don't wait until a month before the due date and panic because the dog isn't ready. You've had months to work on it and you need months. So start right away. Following are some ideas to try.

Teach Westie to 'Leave It'

This is a common training lesson that will be very valuable once baby is here. It is hard to think of any other command that will be of more help. If Westie doesn't know it, teach it now.

- Starting Out Using Toys

(Just a couple of words of warning before we start...never, ever yell at or hit your dog while training. Make this a positive exercise. Don't try to force the toy out of the dog's mouth. It can be done but won't accomplish your goal of teaching him to 'leave it' willingly. Remember that you are 'teaching'. This means 'coaxing' the behavior and then 'rewarding' the behavior. If you get frustrated, quit for a while and come back to it when you are more relaxed.)

Begin by teaching the word. To do this, you will want to encourage/coax the behavior to happen and then put the word with the behavior. Start when your Westie comes to you with a toy and wants to play tug. Instead, encourage him to 'give' you the toy. To do this, you can put your hand on the toy in his mouth and at the same time, take another toy in your other hand and wiggle it around to get his attention to it. When he opens his mouth to switch to the other toy, immediately say, 'Leave it'. (Note: The words 'leave it' are often used but any words will do. It isn't the words that matter. It is the consistency of using the same words or sounds, the consistency of tone and inflection that matter.) If the other toy doesn't work, you can use a treat in the other hand to get his attention. Each time he opens his mouth and lets go of the toy you are holding, say, 'leave it'. Notice that you don't say, 'leave it' until he has actually begun to release the toy. The word and the action should happen at the **SAME TIME**. After he has done it correctly, say 'Good leave it' to reinforce that he has done it correctly and pleased you. This will take many

repetitions for him to get the idea. It is better to practice this several times a day for 5 minutes than once a day for a half hour. You don't want him to get bored with the game. Eventually, he will start to associate 'leave it' with the action of releasing the toy. (Another warning...during the learning process, it will not all occur at once and in a straight line. Often you will get to the point where Westie is doing it perfectly but when you return some hours later and try it again, he will have forgotten and need reminders to get going again. Expect some backstepping. This is normal. Your Westie isn't being 'dumb' or 'stubborn'. He is just being normal. Training does take patience.) When he has this down solidly, you can go on to other things. REMEMBER: Don't rush the training and give LOTS OF PRAISE AND REWARDS

- Other Objects

When Westie gets good at this game, move on to other objects. We suggest you start keeping Westie toys in a toy box or basket just for Westie. Not too many toys. A half dozen is plenty. Now get a toy box WITH A LID for baby. And put that in a different area of the same room. Put baby things in this box. Don't put in anything that might resemble a doggie toy...no stuffed toys etc. Put things that the dog can easily learn to distinguish as baby things. For instance, buy a couple of pacifiers, a rattle, a plastic key chew toy, a bib. Put these baby things in the baby toy box. Close the lid whenever you are not actively working with Westie.

Now, when Westie approaches the toy box, let him sniff around it a bit. But don't let him get into it or take anything out of it. If the Westie attempts to take something from the box, say, 'leave it' and quickly offer him one of his own toys. Follow this by playing together with him and that toy. Do this frequently and also frequently initiate play with his toys without him approaching the baby toy box. Also, occasionally leave a baby toy on the floor. Again when the Westie approaches it, say, 'leave it' and give him one of his own toys. The message you want him to get is, 'If I stick to my own toys and my own box, mom and dad will play with me. If I take baby's toys from the floor or from the box, they make me leave it. It's more fun to play with my toys.' Whenever you aren't supervising, make sure the lid to the baby toy box is down so Westie doesn't ever get away with playing with the baby things. You want to make sure the dog is always successful. Don't set him up for failure by leaving the lid open. Please note though, that when baby becomes a toddler and starts leaving toys on the floor, it is going to be very hard, if not impossible for the Westie to be able to consistently distinguish his toys from baby's toys. You can work on this but don't expect perfection. REMEMBER: Don't rush the training and give LOTS OF PRAISE AND REWARDS

- Step It Up

Now, Westie is doing really well but he has to learn about harder things. Sometimes baby toys will look a lot like doggie toys. How about adding a teddy bear to the baby toy box. Just one more confusing toy at a time until he understands that if it came from that box, it is not mine to play with. NEVER give in and let him play with a baby toy. You will confuse him.

- Moving Objects

Finally, here are some really hard things. Up until now the toys are just laying there with no movement. But you need to prepare for when baby is here and starts moving around.

When baby is here, there will be other things going on. Baby may toddle by dragging teddy bear by the leg. Westies have instincts that say, 'Catch and kill that teddy bear that is moving along the floor'. He needs to learn 'leave it' with moving things. So you drag teddy bear along the floor and tell Westie to leave it. (You can also tie a string to a toy and drag it from some distance so that doggie doesn't necessarily associate the moving toy with you.) **BIG REWARDS** when he does 'leave it' successfully. Food rewards are appropriate!! How about crawling baby. Those little hands and feet and knees shuffling along the floor will be hard to resist. So do a lot of practice duplicating things that might be tempting. You might invest in a doll that crawls or tie a string around the doll to move it across the floor. Remember to have one person on the floor with the Westie to make sure that Westie treats the doll gently and gets lots of praise for being good. And discontinue other play that inspires this type of 'attack and destroy' behavior.

Walk along with a pacifier in your hand. Drop it as Westie is watching. Make sure to say, 'leave it' and make sure he does. Make sure that he doesn't go and get it again while you take a minute or two to pick it up. Set down a baby bottle of milk on the floor. When he approaches to sniff, say, 'Leave it'. You can set up all kinds of practice situations that will imitate real life so you won't have to start from scratch when you have a baby to care for.

ANOTHER METHOD

Following is another method for teaching 'leave it'. It may be harder to teach it this way, especially if the dog is strongly food driven. You may want to leave this method until last and use it as a way to strengthen his training. Use this method only if you are very patient. Understand that not all dogs will be able to do this. It is especially hard for dogs who love their treats!! But it is a way to strengthen his training.

Start out with treats. (If Westie is food-driven, low value treats such as pieces of a light kibble may be the easiest to start with.) Find a quiet space. Put Westie in a sit or down. Put a treat on the floor in front of Westie....maybe a foot or so away. Keep your fingers on the treat to protect it. Tell the Westie to 'leave it'. When Westie tries for the treat, cover it and say, 'Leave it'. Westie will try to nudge your fingers off the treat. Don't let him. Keep protecting it. If he backs off a bit, lift your fingers a bit so he can see it and repeat, 'Leave it'. As he comes near, cover it again and repeat. Eventually, Westie will get bored with this game, back off and quit trying for the treat. As soon as that happens, say, 'YES!! or OK!!' and give him the treat. Now Westie realizes that he did something right but doesn't know quite what. Repeat this game for 5 minutes at a time 3-4 times a day. Soon he will catch on and begin to back off right away. When this starts happening, move that treat closer to his feet. The old behaviors will revert until he understands that the same rules apply. Eventually you will be able to put that treat right at his feet and even ON his feet without having to protect with your hand.

You will be able to leave the treat there for longer and longer periods of time and even get up and walk around without him taking the treat until you say YES (or OK) and give it to him.

Suggestion: It is your choice if you let him take the treat off the floor or if you insist that he has to wait for you to pick it up.

Because you are preparing for baby, we suggest you make him wait for you to give it to him. This will help later when baby is there and your hands are too full to go and pick up whatever object is on the floor.

**LIFE WAS GOOD BEFORE BABY...
NOW LIFE WITH BABY IS EVEN BETTER!!!!**

Baby's Room

Prepare baby's room (and any other physical changes to the house) well in advance. This will allow Westie to adjust to these changes ahead of time. When baby arrives, he will already have this change 'out of the way'. When you are in baby's room, let Westie be in there with you. Let Westie inspect everything and become comfortable in the room before baby arrives. See what he gets into and rearrange for safety, again, before baby arrives. Remember that when baby gets there, the smells will be much more attractive to him. Make sure you have a secure area for dirty diapers. Make sure Westie can't reach the baby in the crib. Put small containers of doggie treats within reach of places that you will be frequently with baby.....the dressing table, the bathing area. That way, doggie can get treats while baby is being cared for without it being an inconvenience. Consider a baby gate on the baby's room door so that doggie can see baby while it naps without being able to approach and stick his nose through the crib bars.

Demotion?

Many times the Westie was the 'apple' of mom and dad's eyes until baby came along. Suddenly Westie is no longer the star of the show. He often becomes just a 'dog' and is treated as such. Westie doesn't know what he did wrong to deserve this demotion. All he does know is that it happened when that baby arrived. Guess who the Westie is going to blame? It is essential that you do not demote your Westie. Any changes that are going to be made, must be made long before the arrival of the baby. Don't suddenly start telling Westie to 'go away'. And don't expect him to accept being ignored. To the greatest extent possible, Westie should remain a prized family member. No, he isn't baby but that doesn't mean he isn't still a wonderful part of your family and he must be treated as such.

Doll

Before baby comes, buy a life-sized doll and receiving blanket. (You might consider one that moves and makes sounds.) Hold that doll and feed it while letting Westie sit beside you and be petted. Keep treats handy so that Westie feels cared for too. You want Westie to believe that 'life was good before baby...life is better with baby'. Don't go out of your way to create occasions for one-on-one time with him excluding baby. When these occasions do occur, see that they aren't quite as good as the time 'with baby'. Make sure that all good things come when baby is there with him. If he has a better time with you when baby isn't there, why would he ever learn to like baby? You must make sure his

best times come when baby is there too. At first these should be even better than ever. He never got treats while lying next to you before but now when baby gets a bottle, he might get a kibble or two himself. Let's feed that baby!!! This won't go on forever. With any training, you start out with lots of treats and eventually occasional treats and then finally rare treats. But giving the treats at first creates a positive association in his mind. 'Baby gets fed and I am happy. I don't remember why several months later but I just know that this makes me happy.'

Audio Tapes

You might be able to find an audiotape with baby noises and crying on it. This will be a good way to let Westie get used to these new sounds when you have the time to concentrate on him and don't have to worry about taking care of baby. Start playing the tapes on a very low volume and gradually increase the volume. If the dog is upset by the crying, use calming words and distract the dog with an activity but don't cuddle, comfort and coddle the dog. Doing this will confirm for him that there is really something there to be upset about! Note: Other audiotapes are helpful for dogs too. Some Westies are very 'noise sensitive'. Playing audiotapes can help them adjust to various sounds.

Food Dish

First, no 'free feeding' the dog once baby comes home. This sets up trouble when baby becomes mobile. Of course, you want to ensure baby's safety but also, you want to be sure Westie is allowed to eat in peace. If he is constantly bothered while eating, he may well develop some eating and stomach disorders. This isn't fair to him and you won't have time to deal with the medical care that could result. Next, does your Westie have any food issues? If so, these must be controlled now, before baby arrives. If he guards his dish, you may have to revert to holding the bowl in your lap while he eats until he gets used to having you near his dish. You can put only a few kibbles in his bowl and then drop more in as he is eating. Let him learn that your hand coming near the bowl is a good thing. Do this until guarding stops. Then start working on him letting you remove the bowl while he is eating. When he allows this, give it back quickly and with lots of praise. Work on this a lot and try to get friends to help. If you cannot correct this behavior, you need to have him eat in his crate where he can't be a threat to baby if baby stumbles by.

Crate Training

If your Westie is not crate trained, now is the time to do it. NOW...BEFORE baby arrives. Don't wait until baby is there and then start sticking him in a crate if you never did it before. Read the article [Crate Training](#) about Crate training. Do it NOW or you will regret it later. You need this tool and Westie needs to have a private place to go and get away from baby. This will become his haven if you do it correctly. Don't deprive him of this privilege. He will thank you for it.

Treats

Make sure your dog knows how to take a treat gently. When your baby has a cookie in his hand, Westie may decide to take it away. That is something you want to correct but at least if it happens, you want him to do so gently!! Put the treat in your hand between your thumb and middle finger curling the 'pointing' finger around it. This makes it difficult for the dog to take the treat by snapping at it. He is forced to work around your fingers to get to the treat. Use the word 'gentle' or 'easy' (or something else appropriate) while he is

working at it. Always let him get it but only when he is working gently.

Baby Arrives

As soon as possible, bring something home from the hospital like a receiving blanket that has the baby's smell on it. Put that doll in the blanket and let the dog be beside you while you hold that doll. Let him smell it and examine it. But make sure he treats the doll gently while doing this. Lots of soft, calming words such as "gentle" will help him. Let him have the blanket to sniff and do with as he will. Also considering bringing home a piece of mom's clothing that has both her scent and the baby's scent on it together. Again, let Westie sniff and smell all he wants.

AT HOME WITH BABY AND TODDLER

This article is meant to discuss preparing for baby but there are some things that need to be said about when baby arrives home and starts to grow into a toddler.

Baby Comes Home

Mom goes into the house alone; dad brings in baby after mom has had a minute or two to really greet and love on Westie. Don't set up Westie for jealousy at this point by having mom's attention divided when she arrives. When baby does come in, let Westie sniff and smell. Let him lick hands and feet. Protect the baby, of course, but let the dog investigate. Use calming words and lots of gentle touches so that doggie feels positive about this new creature. As time goes on, let Westie participate in diaper changes, feedings, etc. (Medical reports now say that children who live with dogs are less likely to have things like asthma.)

Doggie Still Needs To GO OUT!

Westies sometimes come into rescue because they are having accidents now that baby is there. Sometimes, when questioned, we find that the dog is still going to the door and telling his people that he needs to go out but his people say they 'don't have time to open the door for him'. Doggie will still need to go out and it may not always be convenient. If you have a fenced area outside the door, consider a doggie door. If your dog doesn't always make it very clear that it is time to go out, try training with bells (see the article ["Housetraining"](#)). Otherwise set a timer to remind you to let the dog out on his normal schedule. OR change his schedule to work with baby's schedule. For instance, when baby needs a diaper change, make it a routine to let the dog outside.

Diapers

We have people say, 'The dog won't leave the baby's dirty diapers alone...he keeps trying to pull them off'. Seems easy enough. If they are dirty, change them!! There is only so much you can expect of this animal!! Of course, he is going to try to get at the baby's dirty diapers. This is what animals are attracted to and you can't change nature that much!!! So change the diapers.

Baby's Behavior

Westies are often not very forgiving of anyone who mishandles them. If baby pulls Westie's ears or tails or falls on top of Westie, there may be consequences. You must always be there to supervise. If you cannot be there, put Westie in his crate. (Remember,

we told you to crate train him!!) Put crate in area that baby can't get to. Behind a baby gate is good. Think of it similarly to not leaving baby alone in the bath even long enough to answer the phone. Don't leave baby alone with doggie even long enough to answer the phone. Accidents happen quickly and if they happen, the consequences can be terrible. So be with baby and doggie and be alert; if you cannot, one or the other needs to be in a protected area.

As baby grows, you must start a dialogue dealing with 'how we treat a dog'. Baby must be taught not to mistreat the dog. Baby must not tease dog with baby's toys unless he wants to share them forever. Baby may not throw toys at the doggie or hit the doggie with toys. Baby must pet gently. Baby must not bite doggie. Baby must not ever touch doggie when doggie is in the crate. Baby must not ever bother doggie when doggie is eating. Remember, baby will grow up and turn into a child, a teen and finally an adult; doggie will be a doggie forever. Baby is capable of learning to be responsible, caring and loving. Mom and Dad are responsible for teaching these things to baby. Bad behaviour towards animals must not be tolerated even when the baby is small. IT ISN'T CUTE.

QUIZ

WILL YOUR WESTIE BE GOOD WITH BABY?

There is no way to totally predict whether a dog will be good with the new baby. But there are a lot of behaviors that can enhance or detract from your chances of success. This quiz is meant to help you identify them.

- 1. Before you have the baby, do you**
 - a) keep life the same as usual; avoid changes that will be needed when the baby comes to allow the dog a few more weeks of 'normal' life?**
 - b) give the dog extra attention because there won't be time for this when the baby arrives?**
 - c) begin any household rearrangements that will be needed long before the baby is due and start training and enforcing rules that the dog will need to live with so that the dog won't associate the changes with the baby?**

- 2. Knowing the new baby will do a considerable amount of crying and noise making, do you**
 - a) wait and let it all be a surprise to the dog and then get upset at the dog when he is upset by the noise and distracted by the smells?**
 - b) give the issue a great deal of thought but put it off because there is so much else to deal with (after all, he is 'just a dog' and should be able to adjust)**
 - c) expose and desensitize the dog to baby sounds and smells so that he will be 'conditioned' to accept these things and react appropriately, thereby allowing him to be more comfortable and you to have that much less to deal with when the baby arrives?**

3. When mom comes home after a stay at the hospital, do you

- a) put the dogs in the basement or another room so they won't get in the way when mom and baby arrive?**
- b) have mom come in carrying the baby so she must say things like 'Off', 'Go Away', 'Don't Touch'?**
- c) have someone else carry the baby in so that mom can greet and love the dog with enthusiasm?**

4. When the dog shows interest in this new 'thing', do you

- a) tell the dog to 'stay away'?**
- b) let the dog sniff but keep a tight lead and pull back on the lead when he tries to kiss the baby?**
- c) put the baby on a blanket and invite the dog to investigate while carefully watching but without showing anxiety....encourage the dog to kiss the baby, give the dog lots of praise for being gentle with the baby?**

5. When it is time to feed the baby, does mom

- a) sit in a new rocking chair where there is no room for doggie?**
- b) sit in the place she used to share with doggie and tell the dog, 'Stay off'?**
- c) sit on the couch or a wide chair and let the dog sit beside her while she feeds the baby?**

6. The baby is napping and you are sitting with the dog and petting him; the baby wakes up and cries, do you

- a) shove the dog off and run to the baby saying nothing?**
- b) tell the dog to 'move' and run to the baby?**
- c) say to the dog, 'Do you hear the baby? Let's go and take care of her!'; and encourage the dog to go with you to the babies room (where you keep a stash of**

treats so the dog has reason to WANT you to take care of the baby and think of the baby's cry as a good sound)?

7. Someone drops the baby's bottle or nipple on the floor, and the dog sniffs or licks it, do you

a) yell at the dog?

b) grab the item and yell at whoever dropped it?

c) calmly tell the dog to 'leave it' because this is a command you trained before the baby arrived or

d) the dog doesn't bother it because you trained the dog to leave bottles and nipples alone before the baby arrived?

I think you are getting the picture! Some dogs are just not going to be good with kids and some dogs will be good despite anything that is done to make this unlikely.....but most dogs will do best if you work at it. And the more work and planning you do ahead of time, the more likely it is that you will handle it correctly when the baby arrives.

Most Westies who don't do well with children, are helped along with their attitude by parents who suddenly abandon them as their 'love objects' and transfer most of that love and attention to the baby. Westies don't tend to do well in homes where they are not the center of attention, especially if they once were. If you anticipate a baby one day and don't feel you can provide the continued positive attention to the dog once the baby arrives, get another breed that is less dependent upon human interactions.

Reminder: Dogs are not disposable objects. You made a commitment to this dog when you got it. You owe it to the dog to work through these issues so that you can remain a family after the baby

arrives.

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