

Keep 'Em Both

Put your worries to rest: Babies and cats can peacefully co-exist.

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The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) published a brochure called *Your Baby and Your Pet* and distributed it to OB/GYNs across the country. The response has been overwhelming, said Nancy Peterson, companion animal issues specialist, who spearheaded the campaign. We got 930 responses back from doctors, most of them praising the program. Sadly, a few responders said that they still recommended cat owners get rid of their cat.

I don't hear this [response] very often, anymore, Weigner said. Most doctors are aware of this fallacy.

Worms are another risk for new parents. Sandra Coon, DVM, of Broadway Veterinary Clinic in Seattle, and mother of 8-month-old Oak, recommends a rigorous de-worming program for intestinal parasites if there are pets living with children under 7 years of age. Roundworms live [and reproduce] in the intestines of animals, Coon said. They can migrate through the human body and end up in unusual places, such as the eyes, and cause blindness, she added. Ask your veterinarian for a recommended deworming program.

Reactions to Baby Cats vary in their tolerance to environmental change. A new baby means lots of changes: from visits, to new smells, to new behavior patterns from parents. It is hard to predict how each cat will react.

For some cats, its no problem at all. My cat, Misha, is more concerned that I feed him on time than [he is] with the baby, said Tracy Kroll, DVM, a veterinarian with a behavior practice in Fair Lawn, N.J., and the mother of 10-week-old Ethan. Misha sniffed Ethan, but otherwise seems fine.

"Both of our cats are clingy lap cats, but I never saw any sign of 'jealousy, said Carol Popolow, DVM, a veterinarian in Croton-on-Hudson, N.Y., and mother of 16-month-old William. The cats do jockey for position on my lap when I am holding or feeding the baby. Now that he is a toddler, the cats like to play tag with William and follow him all around the house hoping he will drop a treat.

If your cat shows stress reactions such as eliminating outside of the litterbox or spraying, it may need a quiet space of its own and time to adjust to the changes associated with the new baby. Anger or punishment will make matters worse; your cat needs extra attention. Cuddle with it while the baby sleeps or schedule some extra playtime.