

Pets & Pacifiers

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Helping families keep pets and children safe, happy and *together*



A perennial sight at neighborhood parks in the Northwest is that of dogs and kids at play — sometimes together, sometimes in their respective playgrounds. The Northwest is nothing if not child- and animal-friendly, and many call both two- and four-legged “kids” family.

Unfortunately, many new or expecting families, already overwhelmed with all things baby, miss the importance of preparing their pets for the new arrival. This can result in problems for the animal, the baby and the parents, sometimes including injury, even leading to the relinquishment of the treasured pet to a shelter after years of loving care.

Dr. Valli Parthasarathy, PhD, DVM of **Synergy Behavior Solutions**, a Portland-based dog training service, spoke of this heartbreaking outcome during a newly launched program called Pets and Pacifiers.

Dr. Parthasarathy related seeing several Craigslist ads from people seeking homes for pets following the arrival of a child. “Just this morning I saw people saying things like, ‘We have a baby on the way, we won’t have time for Rufus.’ Or, ‘We have a great dog but we also have an 8-month-old and he is scared of the baby.’”

Parthasarathy emphasizes the program that with education and preparation, these types of scenarios can often be avoided.

“Pets and Pacifiers” is the brainchild of Dr. Parthasarathy and Dr. Jason Nicholas, BVetMed(HONS), a former emergency veterinary doc with **DoveLewis** now building his own practice, **The Preventative Vet**. The two doctors met after Parthasarathy found Nicholas’ card in a local coffee shop and contacted him, resulting in a fast alliance around the concept of preventative practices for life with pets and

children.

The duo developed the Pets and Pacifiers program, and held the first workshop last month to an appreciative audience. It is their hope to prevent the kinds of illness and injuries they've seen too often when pets and children cohabitate. Both are optimistic that the program will help minimize visits to the emergency room.

"If you search for resources to help people keep 4- and 2-leggeds safe, together and happy . . . they don't exist," says Nicholas. "Certainly we don't want to overwhelm or scare people, but when they come out of this [presentation] and they've seen all of this, then they're aware and it's now in the back of their mind. One small thing can make a huge difference."

Examples of such small things include dispensing children's medicines over a bowl or sink, keeping stray tablets or drops from landing on the floor where a pet can quickly lap them up; or introducing items such as baby strollers or car seats beforehand so a dog or cat can get familiar before baby arrives. Dr. Parthasarathy also suggests preparing dogs for shorter walks, reduced park time, and even gated areas at home well before baby comes home.

By offering real-world cases and practical solutions, both doctors hope that new and expectant families will use the information to integrate all family members in a way that keeps everyone safe during a time when the routine is anything but, and fatigue is high for everyone.

Attendee Jan Berichon, of **The Safety Store at Legacy Emanuel Children's Hospital**, said, "I think it's great information. I would love to see gynecologists and pediatricians talk to their families about this because I think it's a topic that's overlooked by a lot of people."

Jennie Criswell, an intern at **Wonder Puppy** in Portland who personally has both grandkids and dogs at home, said, "This was a wonderful opportunity. There was a lot of information about things that some of us don't even think about."

To learn more about Pets and Pacifiers and to access a wealth of information on its website, visit **petsandpacifiers.com**. The doctors hope to offer the program at locations throughout the Portland Metro area, educating in as many neighborhoods as possible. Dr. Nicholas, father of two young daughters himself, is eager to get the material to friends and neighbors. "It's really just making people aware that this resource is there."



Nikki Jardin is a Portland-based freelance writer who loves to write about people dedicated to making the world a better place for all beings. When she's not writing, she's either exploring the great outdoors, traveling, or volunteering with Fences For Fido, a local nonprofit dedicated to giving dogs freedom from a previously chained life.

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