

Training Your Ferret

By Alicia Drakiotes

Why do I need to train my ferret?

Because ferrets have so much energy and are so mischievous, training your ferret is important for ensuring that you have a harmonious household. A kit (baby ferret) needs patient, supportive training so he or she can discern what behaviors are acceptable to humans. When training your ferret, always use positive reinforcement methods.

Many people who have complaints about their ferrets' behavior have simply not trained them properly. Even though your ferret is a pet, he still has many instinctual behaviors. If you don't want a particular behavior or trait, you should work positively to alter that behavior through training. Remember, your ferret doesn't perceive his behavior as good or bad – he's just acting like a ferret!



One mistake many people make with baby ferrets is allowing them to gnaw (teethe) while they are young. It seems almost cute the way they gently chew on fingers or hands. This same behavior is not so cute, however, when the ferret's teeth have fully erupted and she has more strength in her jaws. When we allow "bad" behaviors to begin and later punish the animal for these same behaviors, we are encouraging antisocial or biting behaviors. The ferret becomes defensive out of fear.

You should also be aware that a medical problem with your ferret can present itself as a behavioral problem. For example, if your ferret's belly is sore and you pick him up, you may get a nip, telling you "Hey, don't squeeze my belly; it hurts." Ear mite infestations, which can make your ferret very grouchy, are another common cause of nipping behavior. So, please train your ferret carefully and pay close attention to his health – you'll have a happier, more well-behaved pet.

Are there any resources for training ferrets?

Great tips on training can be found on the Internet:

Training your ferret not to nip: www.ferretcentral.org/faq/part3.html#nipping

Tips on litter training: www.ferretcentral.org/faq/part3.html#litterpan

The following publications are also helpful when training your ferret:

Ferrets for Dummies by Kim Schilling

Training Your Pet Ferret by Gerry Bucsis and Barbara Somerville

If you have a ferret who is hearing deficient or deaf, you won't be able to use verbal commands. For tips on training and handling deaf ferrets, the following web page is an excellent resource: <http://wolfysluv.jacksnet.com/deaf.html>.

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See also: Positive Reinforcement: Training with Praise and Rewards