

Ferret Bites And Ignores The Litter Box

How can a ferret be trained not to bite ankles and to use the litter box instead of the carpet?

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Q: I have two ferrets, both less than a year old. One is good about being kind while I'm moving about, but the other tends to run up and bite my ankles. Most of the time it's a very hard bite, too, but not hard enough to break the skin. It hurts. If I'm at my desk, I keep my feet in the chair so she won't be able to bite. I've been trying to find out why and haven't gotten very far. She also has a big problem with the litter box. Whenever I let her out of her cage she'll only go on the carpet, and I'm afraid my other ferret will start to regress if it continues. Do you have any suggestions that could help stop the biting and the carpet messes?

A: A biting problem is difficult to solve if we don't know why she is biting you. If she is biting for attention, then you need to make sure that you pay attention to her when she is out, before she needs to bite. If she is trying to initiate play, then you probably need to spend a little playtime with her when she is first out of the cage. Keep it appropriate by using interactive toys and not your hands or feet.

It is also possible that something is startling her or she is young and hasn't learned bite inhibition yet. Until you know why she is biting make sure to protect your legs from her bite. Wear long pants and socks with shoes. You can even wear boots if you know she is going to be out and gunning for your ankles.

To help determine why she is biting, keep a journal of bite incidents that lists what is happening at the time, before and after, and her general mood.

Litter use is a whole separate issue, but you can help the situation by being very watchful of her behavior. Ferrets need to eliminate fairly frequently, so after a short while of being out playing, place her either in a litter box in the room or back in the cage. Once she has used the litter box, allow her to come out again to play. You can also make sure litter boxes are available in the places she has previously used to eliminate, which encourages her to use the litter box instead of the carpet.