

Ferret Bites Everyone

How can a ferret that bites people and other pets be stopped from doing this?

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Q: I recently bought a ferret that's about 7 months old from my neighbor. He has a problem with biting and attacks anyone he comes into contact with, including my other pets. I have tried everything from squirting him with water bottles to tapping him on the nose and telling him to be nice. If I tell him to be nice, he doesn't bite me, but he then finds someone else to bite. I really don't want to get rid of him, but I can't have him attacking my cats and the toddlers at my daycare. How can I stop his biting?

A: Using any form of punishment doesn't generally work with a ferret, because it will either ignore it or learn to distrust you (or your hands). Much like in puppies, the important thing is to redirect the ferret onto something that is appropriate for chewing and biting, like a Kong-type toy.

Your ferret may need some one-on-one time from you in order to teach him how to act around the other animals and people. Please note that ferrets should not be left alone with any other animal, except maybe a cat, because either animal might get hurt. Ferrets are carnivores and will see any small animal as prey.

Most ferrets bite for only a few reasons — either the ferret wants to be held, it doesn't want to be held or it is afraid of people and/or people's hands. You must figure out which is the motivator for your ferret's biting and address that issue specifically.

If your ferret playfully attacks the cats, he may need additional stimulation. You should provide appropriate toys and interactions so that your ferret can burn off its excess energy.

I love my ferrets dearly, but I would not recommend allowing a ferret under 1 or 2 years old or a ferret new to your home to interact with young children. This is as much for the safety of the children as it is for the ferret. I have worked with a few bad biters that had been poked at through a cage by children or that were roughly handled by young and well-meaning children.

If the situation involved only your child, then you could teach him or her how to appropriately handle the ferret. With many young children around, I would keep the ferret away from them.