

Ferret Communication

Use this ferret-to-human dictionary to communicate better with your pet ferret.

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Although ferrets can't converse like people do, they can still communicate with you and you with them.

Our little ferrets do not have the lingual capabilities that humans do, but that does not mean that they are unable to communicate. Ferrets make many sounds and movements to try to convey what they want. Unfortunately, people don't always understand what ferrets are trying to say. Use this ferret-to-human dictionary to help you understand your pet better.

How Ferrets Express Emotions

Afraid: Your ferret may shriek and hide, or tremble severely and cower down. If you have just acquired your ferret, let your pet come out to you rather than reaching in to grab it. In its state of fear, your ferret may bite you. Try offering it a treat on a spoon to lure it to you.

Curious: Cats are known for their curiosity, but ferrets aren't far behind! A ferret usually keeps its body low to the ground and circles something to check it out. Ferrets may also make a soft "dooking" or chuckling sound to indicate that they are excited about their find.

Danger: If a ferret thinks that it is in danger it may screech, hiss, arch its back, foof (release scent from its anal glands if it still has them) or poop on the floor.

Excited: Your ferret may dance the Weasel War Dance or may just produce a very loud dooking sound. While a cautious ferret will dook with its head down, an excited ferret will usually dook with its head raised. The more excited the ferret is, the faster and louder it dooks.

Fearful: Your ferret may hiss and shy away from something with its head down if it is fearful, but won't actually run and hide like a ferret that is truly afraid of something.

Hungry: A ferret hanging around an empty food dish wants something to eat. Your ferret may also walk up to you and then walk to the dish to indicate what it wants. It is usually best to have dry food available to your ferret at all times so that it can eat when it wants. Just make sure that the food is changed regularly so it stays fresh, especially in humid climates.

Mad: A ferret that is mad about something may pout, hiss, bite or chase another ferret. It may even hiss at or bite its owner, but aggression toward people is rare in an established pet.

Pain: Ferrets are very stoic animals that don't often express pain. Some exceptions are: If you step on their tail or on a toe they might shriek, hiss or dook very fast as if cussing you out; or if they are not feeling well they might flatten themselves down and squint their eyes. A trip to the veterinarian is usually in order if a ferret isn't feeling well.

Sadness: Ferrets can get depressed, just like people. The loss of a cagemate or a human companion can trigger depression. The ferret might search for its companion in places that their missing friend usually occupied. The ferret might slouch down like it is in pain and sigh a lot, but it won't have the squinty eyes of a ferret in physical pain.

Territorial: Some ferrets are very territorial or possessive of certain toys, beds, litter boxes or treats. I have seen ferrets have hissing fits over a favorite treat that sometimes even progresses to a shrieking match. This is usually an act between two ferrets and not between a ferret and a person. When you give a favorite treat, make sure the ferrets are far enough apart not to react to each other, and have extra treats on hand so if one ferret starts to bully the other, you can lure it away with the extra treat.