
Ferret Discipline

To discipline your ferret, a stern **NO!** with a tap or flick of your fingers on the nose is usually sufficient. You may also want to try scruffing your ferret and hissing in his face. **Do not hit** the ferret, use a rolled newspaper, or other “training guide” used for other animals. They just don’t understand and something big swooping down on them is reason enough to defend themselves. It has been suggested to ignore a nip because the ferret is trying to get your attention. If you ignore the “wrong” signal, that is biting, and reward with “another” signal, for example, eye contact, your ferret should catch on quickly. If biting or nipping makes you initially nervous, there is a product in the pet shops called Bitter Apple. It tastes bad to pets and helps teach them what not to bite. Spray it onto your hands before handling strange animals instead of using gloves. Any time you feel that you need to wear protective



clothing with a ferret for safety purposes, then you either do not have a domestic ferret or you have a very disturbed animal.

Biting

(We are not talking about nipping here.)

When a ferret is mishandled, not handled enough, or abused, it can result in a confused animal and sore hands for the shelter handlers. NEVER adopt out a ferret that bites except to a very experienced person who wants the challenge. Kits that bite seem to go through a “terrible twos” stage at seven to twelve weeks. If you continue to handle them, softly bopping the nose or scruffing and hissing in their face when they get out of line, they will grow up to be good little ferrets. A last resort type of training that I have found effective is to bite the ferret back right after it has bitten me. I apply pressure with my teeth to the bridge of the offending ferret’s nose, just enough to get a squeak from the ferret. For me, this method tells the ferret that biting is uncomfortable for all concerned and I’ve only had to do it twice to get the point across.

Also, don’t encourage your young ferrets to bite. Don’t stick your fingers (or let others poke at ferrets) through

the wires of the cages, no matter how tempting the cute face is. Ferrets think it is a chew toy or treat. Always offer your knuckle or back of your hand to a ferret that is unfamiliar with you. Don’t give the ferret treats like Linatone or Nutrical on your finger until it’s old enough to know the difference between

where the treat ends and where your finger starts.



If you have an adult ferret that bites, it will depend upon its background

and your time and patience whether it can be rehabilitated or not. Be very careful with biters, especially if you have not been “blessed” by an agitated ferret. They can not only inflict punctures, but “lock” on very tightly. If you are alone, this can be traumatic trying to pry the beast off. If bitten in a “death grip” type hold, turn on a faucet with a free hand and pour running water over the ferret’s face. Grab the ferret with a towel after it releases you and cage it for further evaluation.

If you get in several “wild” ferrets that go straight for the fingers, fight for food and water, and fight with each other, separate them immediately. Place each one in cages with calm, social and well-adjusted ferrets. They will not tear your other adoptees up, but rather realize the calming effect of socializing. Unless the ferret absolutely will not leave the others alone, leave them for a few days. Handle them after that, one at a time, without gloves. Spray Bitter Apple on your hands if you feel you need some protection. Stroke gently, reward with Linatone, and alter them if they are intact animals.

If you get a ferret in that appears abused or afraid and strikes out at you for no good reason, offer it a treat (raisin, Linatone) as you pick it up. One reason is to distract the mouth from biting. The other is to show the ferret that being handled is a good thing. It may take weeks or months to rehabilitate a biter, and then they do not make trustworthy pets in homes with children.



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