

Behavior, Understanding Your Gerbil's

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Ever wonder why your gerbil behaves the way he does? Behavior that may seem strange to you may be completely natural and instinctive to him. A basic understanding of a few common, natural gerbil behaviors and instincts can help you better relate to your pet.

Common natural behaviors

You may see your gerbil rubbing his abdomen on objects in the cage. Gerbils have a scent gland on their abdomen and rub on objects to leave their scent. This marks their territory and is a behavior similar to a cat rubbing against your leg or an easy chair.

A behavior common to all gerbils is their method of greeting one another. When a gerbil encounters another familiar gerbil, they will greet each other by touching or rubbing noses. Sometimes, they may even try to touch noses with you.

You may also see your gerbil wink at you. Eye winking is often a sign of pleasure or gratitude, but can also signify submissiveness. Try winking at your gerbil and he will often respond by winking back.

Behavioral sounds

Your gerbil not only exhibits fascinating behavior - he can also make some interesting sounds. "Thumping" is a common gerbil sound made by pounding both back feet on the floor at the same time. Thumping could signify a sexual display or a warning to other gerbils of some perceived danger. Once a single gerbil begins thumping, it is mimicked by other gerbils in the group, producing an amazingly loud noise in relation to the size of those making the noise. Young gerbils seen thumping are often just "practicing."

Your gerbil will squeak loudly if he feels he is in danger.

Your gerbil will also make a vibrating sound similar to the purr of a cat. You may feel this as you hold him in your hand. This conveys a message of feeling safe and content.

Aggressive behavior

Sometimes, it's difficult to tell whether your gerbil is acting aggressively, playing, or is perhaps



frightened. Several factors in your gerbil's environment, such as overcrowding or threatened territory, can contribute to aggressive behavior. Most often, you'll see your gerbil exhibit the common, instinctive "fight or flight" behavior, during which he'll either attack/retaliate against the threatening stimulus or flee to safety. A threatened gerbil will often first respond with a loud squeak.



If you are housing gerbils together, and they are showing aggression toward each other, separate them immediately. If your gerbil is behaving aggressively towards you, re-evaluate at how you approach and handle your pet. Always be quiet, calm, and gentle.

Your gerbil may be exhibiting aggressive behavior because he's reacting to environmental stress (drafts, temperature extremes, repeated frightening encounters with larger pets or small children, etc.). Stress can have serious health and/or psychological effects. If your gerbil is being aggressive for no visible reason, make an effort to determine what the stressor is (there may be more than one), and then correct/remove it. If you cannot find any environmental cause for your pet's aggressive behavior, consult your veterinarian. Your pet could have an illness and be in pain.

Gaining your gerbil's trust

To win your gerbil's trust in any situation, you must be patient, gentle, and ready to offer lots of positive reinforcement. Be very careful not to frighten or startle your gerbil when interacting with him; he may respond by biting. Begin all handling and play sessions by speaking soothingly to your gerbil, so he realizes that you mean him no harm. You can also use small amounts of [treats](#) as an introduction to each session, first placing the treat in your palm and allowing your gerbil to take at will. Eventually, your pet will trust you enough to take treats you extend to him.