

Introduce Your Ferret to Strangers, How to

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff



Meeting new people can be stressful for your ferret and a little intimidating for the people they meet! But with a few helpful tips, you can make the introductions as stress free as possible for everyone involved.

Know when to initiate the meeting

There will be times when your ferret just isn't up to meeting new people, and the most common time is when he is under stress. Examples of this are when you're in your veterinarian's office or while you're traveling with your ferret. While many people may come up to you to see what you have in your carrier, it is not the time for your ferret to make new friends. Your ferret is probably already stressed from the travel and, in the case of a visit to the veterinarian, being surrounded by the smell of other animals, so you don't know how he will react to strangers. Even the sweetest ferret can bite under stress. In these situations, answer people's questions about your ferret politely, but explain to them that you would rather they not touch or hold your ferret, as you don't want to stress him unnecessarily.

Strange or unfamiliar places also increase stress levels and make your ferret's behavior unpredictable, so you want to limit your ferret's contact with strangers in strange places. Ferrets will interact best with strangers in an environment where they feel comfortable. This obviously includes your own home, but also includes familiar places or anywhere your ferret has had a chance to explore.

Pay attention to your ferret's behavior before allowing strangers to touch him. If your ferret has a bottle brushed tail or bristled fur, he may be too excited or fearful to handle interaction with strangers. If he hisses, screeches, or screams at you, or anyone else, this is definitely a sign that he isn't receptive to meeting new people right now. You know your ferret's sounds and body language best, so use those to determine whether or not you can introduce him to someone.

How to introduce a ferret you're holding

While you obviously need to take the thoughts and feelings of the people who are meeting your ferret into account, your first concern should always be for the safety of your ferret. Make sure to hold him securely with his entire body supported. He is not going to feel safe if his hind end is dangling in mid air.

The best way to hold a ferret to introduce him to someone is to grasp him so that your hand creates a cradle under his front arms and his entire body is resting along your arm. In this position, you should have a firm grip around your ferret's chest and he can wrap his legs around your forearm. This will allow you to keep a hand free to protect him. He can either face you or the person he's meeting, depending on how you think he will react.

Invite the person to pet your ferret gently, with two fingers. If your ferret has any quirks, such as disliking people reaching over his head to pet him, let the person know that. It's your responsibility as his owner to make sure that the person touching him is aware of what he does and doesn't like. If there are multiple people around you, make sure that only one person at a time is permitted to touch your ferret. Too many hands reaching to touch him simultaneously can be upsetting.

Allowing other people to hold your ferret

If you are at home or in another ferret-proofed place, you can let someone hold your ferret, but make sure they are familiar with ferrets and know how to hold them. Regardless of how familiar they are with ferrets, do not leave them alone with your ferret unless they know him. We do not recommend allowing anyone to hold your ferret when you are outside unless they are very familiar with your ferrets. If he or she were to accidentally drop your ferret, your ferret could quickly escape.

How to introduce a ferret in your home

A very important part of introducing strangers to your ferrets is educating them on ferrets, especially in your home. When strangers meet your ferret outside your home, you will most likely be holding your ferret, but when they meet a ferret running loose in a home, it's an entirely new experience, one that they will only be ready for with your help!

Prepare them for how interested your ferret will be with a new human in his environment. When your ferrets are running loose, warn your guest to be careful not to step on them, as it's pretty much guaranteed that one or more ferrets will be wandering around her feet. Explain to your guest that ferrets will sniff and explore a new person much as they would a new room so she isn't taken aback when your ferret does it. If your ferret starts war dancing in front of her, explain that that is how ferrets invite play and that it is not an aggressive behavior.

If having ferrets running around and playing in front of her makes your guest uncomfortable, hold your ferrets or only let one out at a time so she doesn't feel overwhelmed. We spend lots of time around our ferrets and their mannerisms are familiar to us, but they may make people who aren't used to them nervous. Be sensitive to other people's fears and concerns about ferrets; a positive experience will go a long way towards dispelling any negative opinions they may already have about ferrets.

Remember, safety should always be your number one concern, both in and out of your home. If you don't feel safe allowing strangers to meet your ferrets at a certain time or place, trust your instincts.