

Introduce Your Ferret to Children, How to

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff

Many people have the misconception that ferrets cannot get along with children and that they will even attack them. The truth is that ferrets will no more attack a child than a dog or a cat would. It is perfectly safe to introduce children to your ferret and to allow children to play with her. However, there are certain things you should do to minimize stress for your ferret and keep her and the children safe.

Before we go into how to introduce a child to your ferret, it's important to note that you should only introduce trained, socialized ferrets to children. Baby ferrets are adorable, but they do tend to be a little nippy before they are bite trained, so you may want to hold off introducing your cute new kit to children until training has been finished. A nip from a ferret probably won't hurt much, but it could scare a child. If you have an older, more docile ferret, she is the best ferret to introduce to a child.

Additionally, some ferrets are leery of children, especially if they have had a bad experience with a child or have been abused. The noise and activity associated with children can be stressful and frightening for them. If you think there is a possibility that your ferret might be scared of children or she has a history of abuse, limit her contact with them to prevent unnecessary stress.

The first time you introduce a child to your ferret, you should always be holding your ferret. Ferrets like to sniff people's feet, and a child could be alarmed by this. If the child were to step back or try to run away, he could step on your ferret. When you hold the ferret, place your hand underneath her front legs so it forms a cradle and grasp her firmly. Then you can either support her hind end with your other hand, or place her body along your forearm. However you decide to hold her, the idea is to make her feel secure and safe.

When you invite the child to pet your ferret, tell him to use two fingers - his index finger and his middle finger. This will ensure that he does not squeeze her and only touches her lightly. If he is scared that she will bite him, turn the ferret around so that her back is facing the child, and invite him to pet her back. If there are multiple children, make sure only one child pets the ferret at a time. Having too many hands reaching for her at once can startle or alarm your ferret. Even the sweetest ferret's behavior can be unpredictable if she feels threatened.

If the child wants to hold your ferret, don't just hand the ferret over. Young children, especially toddlers, should be made to sit down first. Explain to the child that the

ferret will want to sniff him a lot so he isn't startled when she does. Demonstrate to him how to hold her (supporting her hind end) so he doesn't squeeze her or drop her. You may want to give him a treat to give her. Make sure the child understands that if your ferret wants to get down, he has to let her go and should not try to grab her to make her stay.

Don't leave the ferret alone with the child, as the child could accidentally hurt her. Younger children may not have the coordination necessary to control their actions, and they have a strong enough grip to injure a ferret. Stay with the child so you can supervise the interaction.

While it is safe to allow supervised interaction between children and ferrets as described above, do not permit children to hold your ferret when you are outside your home. A wriggly ferret could easily escape from a child's arms, and you may not be able to catch her again. If you are outside and a child asks to hold your ferret, simply tell him that he is welcome to pet her, but you don't feel comfortable allowing people to hold her while you're out and about.

In addition to introducing ferrets to children, it is also safe to introduce ferrets to infants. The key is constant supervision, as it would be with any animal. You should never leave a pet alone with your infant, whether that pet is a ferret, a cat, a dog, or another animal. When introducing an infant to your ferret, always hold your ferret. Ferrets should not be allowed to run loose around babies without some form of restraint, whether that is your hand or a [harness and lead](#). Allow the baby to touch the ferret's back with one hand. Even if he does get a handful of your ferret's hair, he is not in a position to cause any bodily harm to her. Simply remove the baby's hand from the ferret if he starts to tug so he doesn't cause the ferret any discomfort.

Because there are many misconceptions about ferrets, you need to make sure that your ferret is protected from a legal standpoint. Never allow strangers - children or adults - to handle or pet your ferret if she is not up-to-date on her rabies vaccinations. If children ask if they can pet your ferret, make sure that their parents are present and have given their consent.

Introducing children to ferrets isn't just safe and fun, it's a learning experience as well. Meeting ferrets and other pets teaches children a valuable lesson about pet ownership and interacting with animals. It is also a great chance for a child to learn more about ferrets.

Always remember - the key to successful interaction between a ferret and a child is to keep the safety of the ferret in mind. If your ferret feels safe and secure and you

properly instruct the child on how to interact with the ferret, you should have a very successful meeting.