

## North Portland Veterinary Hospital

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### FERRETS -Bite Training

#### Kit Training 101

ALL kits are nippy starting from 6-10 weeks of age. The reason is the same as the nippy phase kittens and puppies go through; they are babies and want to play. Unfortunately for us, ferret skin is VERY thick and tough, so they bite each other hard in play. What you have to do is teach your ferret that nipping is not an acceptable way to play with humans. The good news is that with the proper training methods, your new kit can be trained out of this phase quickly and easily.

First and most important . . . NEVER hit, bop, nose flick, gag or thump your kit. Doing this generally teaches them that YOU are a threat, an enemy, something to be defended against, and can create a mistrustful, nervous, nipping ferret. The correct methods should be taken in stages; how many stages you must go through depends on your ferret.

Stage 1 – For 4-5 days, when your kit starts to nip, reaches as if nipping, pretends to nip, or is even just looking like she is about to, make a noise in a high pitched, shrill voice of “ooww” or “aaiyy”. This is the noise one ferret makes to another to say “too much, you hurt me, knock it off”. If you take good care of, and love your ferret, she is trying to play with you and doesn’t wish to hurt you. 90% of kits will stop and look at you with an “Omigosh, I HURT you?” look on their face.

IF your kit does not respond to this, ADD TO THAT . . .

Stage 2 – Pick the kit up by the scruff and stare into her eyes and after the “oww” let out a hiss. Yes, a hiss, just like a cat hiss. Again, this is how a ferret says a stern “NO”.

Use Stages 1 and 2 together for another 4-5 days. If your kit does not respond to this, ADD TO THAT . . .

Stage 3 – After doing all the above, while still holding the kit by her scruff, VERY LIGHTLY drag her back and forth across the floor about 3-4 times in about a 3 foot area. This is a ferret’s strict punishment. Try all this together for about 4-5 days.

*A few hints while doing all this.*

1. You can always use Bitter Apple either on your skin or clothing.
2. NEVER put her down or in her cage after nipping. You will be teaching her that biting is the proper way to ask to be let down or put up.
3. You CAN use a small pet taxi for a “time out” if she is being stubborn. An empty pet taxi for only 2 minutes is a huge punishment for a playful kit.

4. ALWAYS make sure to reward and reinforce good behavior with love, cuddles, petting, kisses, treats, praise etc. This helps show the kit how nice it can be as opposed to getting in trouble.
5. If you say the word "NO" in a calm, quiet, yet stern voice at the same time as doing the "oww" noises, your ferret will learn to respond to the word "NO" the same as the "ferret talk".
6. A kit is also teething and learning what she can do with her teeth. I have wonderful success with providing a hard dog biscuit as a "teether" for kits.
7. You can also get "SuperChews" or "Cheweasels"; they provide all kinds of chewing action and pose no risk if any bits are ingested.
8. Provide toys and interact with acceptable human play behavior. They love almost anything as a toy, some will like those dog rope bones, the small ones made for toy breeds work excellent. The idea is to teach interaction, play and have fun with you without using nipping as a type of play. Make sure you reward for correct playtime.
9. A kit will be more nippy if they are hungry; make sure your ferret has recently eaten before engaging in play time. Also have treats available to help establish that you are her caretaker and will provide for her.
10. A young ferret is also at her most nippy when first let out, it helps to let her run off a little of the excess energy playing for a while and let her mellow out a bit before interacting.
11. When she is tired from playtime and ready to pas out for a much needed nap, instead of placing her back in her cage right away, hold her on your lap and pet her while she drifts off. This helps teach her that quiet, loving moments and petting are great fun too.

Above all, remember to give your ferret everything she needs, make her as happy and well loved as possible.

If you have additional questions about ferrets, please contact the Oregon Ferret Association, PO Box 90682, Portland, OR 97290, (503)306-2968 (voicemail, [www.oregon-ferret.org](http://www.oregon-ferret.org)).

This article courtesy of the Cascade Ferret Network [www.cascade-ferret.org](http://www.cascade-ferret.org)