

## Avoid Pet Bird Jealousy

**Try some of these tips when you introduce a new flock member to your pet bird.**

*By Chris Davis*

Include your pet bird as you prepare for the newcomer's arrival to your home. Courtesy Kim Burney, Michigan

Introducing a new family member does not have to be a traumatic experience for your existing pet bird. Following a few simple suggestions can make a profound impact on how the new individual, human or animal, is accepted by your pet bird.

- 1) Avoid nasty surprises. Prepare your pet bird for the new arrival by telling it that there is a new member of the family coming. Your pet bird might not understand exactly what is happening but will know that you are sharing some important information, just as you would with any other family member.
- 2) Allow your pet bird to participate in preparations for the newcomer. Talk to it when setting up new equipment, regardless of whether it is a new cage or a crib for a child. It's important that your bird clearly understands that the new addition will not usurp its position in the "flock."
- 3) Maintain normal conditions as much as possible. If your pet bird's cage needs to be moved to make room for the new addition, do so well in advance of the arrival date, so that it does not associate the newcomer with its being disrupted.
- 4) If possible, don't overwhelm your pet bird with several new experiences at the same time — even good ones. Sometimes, people purchase a new cage for their existing pet bird when they get another bird. Lower stress levels by doing so long enough in advance for the existing bird to grow comfortable with it. If the old cage is being given to the newcomer, have it repainted and install new perches and toys so that it appears different to its original owner.
- 5) Be the liaison with all new relationships. Always hold your existing pet bird the first time it actually sees the new arrival, even if it is a newborn child. For example, place the baby in a bassinet in another room then take your bird to see the newcomer. Adjust the baby's blanket while holding your bird. Let the bird know that it is your first baby. Talk to the baby about how important your bird is. Tell your bird that the baby is important, too, and that you need the bird's help taking care of it. If you do this, don't be surprised if the bird begins to squawk when the child is fussy or if there is a problem. Many of my clients have found that their birds behaved like little "nannies" after having this talk with them! Follow similar guidelines with animal adoptions.
- 6) Do not expect your bird to love everyone you love. Only expect it to be well-behaved when they are around. If the newcomer is a romantic interest, hold the bird the first time it sees your human friend. If your bird accepts going to strangers, ask it to step on the person's arm, praising it when he does. Take your bird back after stepping onto the other person's arm, and praise it again, offering a food treat and a cuddle or scratch, whichever it prefers. The newcomer can offer treats if your bird is amenable. Never force the bird to go to someone when it does not want to. Allow your bird to grow comfortable with the new person in its own time.
- 7) Maintain the bird's importance in the family. After the newcomer's arrival, the existing bird can easily be incorporated into activities by placing it on a portable perch or gym or, the back of a metal folding chair or step stool, so that it can be part of the experience without actually needing to be handled. It is not necessary to do this every time you are interacting with the newcomer, but frequently enough to teach your little friend some social manners. Start with very short sessions, and praise your bird profusely when it remains perched. After it becomes more comfortable, brief words of praise, offered intermittently, will keep it there. Food rewards can be offered for birds that are motivated by their stomachs.
- 8) Consider the safety of all of your loved ones. Be realistic about the limitations of both small children and your bird. In cases where your bird is curious and climbs down to see the newcomer, keep it caged when you cannot supervise it, or place it on a perch that it cannot climb off of. Whatever the situation, remember to praise it. Include it verbally and visually while you are visiting or interacting with the newcomer.
- 9) Use physical barriers where necessary. When a baby becomes a curious toddler and may invade the bird's cage, a baby fence or corral works very well when placed around the cage. They are readily available in most baby stores. If necessary, the fence may need to be used for several years until your child learns to respect the bird's territory and well-being. That is OK. After all, it is better to keep your family intact, whenever possible.

10) Be patient and compassionate. It often takes time to incorporate all the elements of a new relationship with the old. With love, patience, compassion and consideration toward all family members, your new relationship can actually enhance everyone's lives, including that of your beloved pet bird.