

Training Your Older Or Re-Homed Pet Bird

Move at your pet bird's pace during your training and you'll be rewarded.

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Courtesy Suzanne Howard, Texas

Older or rehomed birds might distrust people, but setting up a training program that goes at the parrot's pace will help bring it around.

It's a challenge to work with a pet bird that has learned, through an unhappy history, to distrust people or to keep them at bay with bites and intimidation. When training older or re-homed pet birds, you are establishing a relationship between person and parrot, so that the bird can understand it is involved in a healthy, cooperative relationship.

Older or re-homed birds might be more reserved about being handled or even being approached. You might have to begin training with the bird in the cage and only slowly move away from it when the bird becomes comfortable with you. Training sessions should be short but frequent. Two short sessions, about 10 minutes, each day will suffice.

Perch Training

Training your bird to step onto a stick or perch might be your first goal if the bird is fearful of hands or just reluctant to approach you. It will also allow others in the household to safely handle your bird.

Offer the stick to your bird just above its feet at its abdomen. It most likely will naturally step up onto the higher object. Hold your hand steady so the perch does not wobble. If your bird does not step onto the perch, hold a favorite treat just out of reach so it must step up to retrieve it. Each time your bird steps up, reward it. Offer praise, food or a chance to play with its favorite toy.

Some other tips for training a re-homed or older pet bird include: Show the bird that it's in a safe place: Let the bird observe you sitting quietly, reading silently or out loud (many experienced bird owners swear by Dr. Seuss books). Respect the bird's boundaries. After any quarantine period, let the bird see how you interact with other birds in your household. Start with a formal training program once your bird is comfortable in the home. Begin with Step Up onto a perch, then graduate to a hand. If your bird is properly rewarded for these sessions, it will begin to look forward to them. When your bird has mastered the basics, you might be able to move on to some trick training that does not involve touching, such as the "turn around." Successfully completing a trick can help your re-homed bird gain confidence.

Step-By-Step

To be successful in training, keep your bird comfortable and do not overwhelm the bird by taking on too much at a time. Break the tricks into small steps and before moving onto another step, be sure your bird has mastered the previous step. Turning a single trick into tiny steps allows plenty of opportunities for praise and rewards.