

## Kid-Hating Parrot

### Teach children how to interact with a pet bird

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Help your kids to have fun interacting with your parrot.

Much to some people's surprise, there is no reason why a parrot should recognize that children are ... well, children. People often assume that psittacine birds instinctively recognize kids as immature humans, automatically making allowances for them. While this might be the case for some parrots, it certainly isn't with others — just like a patient old retriever might tolerate rough childish handling more than a small terrier might. Instead, some parrots appear to recognize children as dangerous creatures that should be avoided at all costs — or driven away.

This all makes more sense if you realize several things.

1. Children can terrify birds. Their high energy levels make them extremely active. They tend to move fast and talk — or shout — in shrill voices.
2. Second, children can be dangerous. Without proper training on acceptable behavior around animals, kids often inadvertently injure critters. Approached from the perspective of a 1/2-pound prey animal, that makes children pretty darn scary, and we all know the best defense is a good offense, right?

#### Tips To Help Kids & Parrots Interact

This does not, however, mean that things cannot be improved between your kids and your parrot.

1. Provide adult supervision and instruction; make sure that your kids know how to act around a bird. They need to learn to watch body language to recognize a bird's comfort level. By learning to identify and respect a bird's boundaries, they won't make mistakes like trying to pet an uncomfortable bird.
2. Make your children the only source of the parrot's favorite food treats. Have them offer a tiny treat (like a piece of a sunflower seed) every time they approach his cage. The parrot will learn to happily anticipate their approach. Have the kids hold treats on a spoon so they won't flinch and startle the bird. Encourage the bird with smiles and praise when he takes the treats politely.
3. Your family's reactions might accidentally be rewarding a parrot for his aggressive behaviors. Dynamic responses to the parrot's actions will likely reinforce his hostility. Instead of excitement and theatrics, offer low energy levels, slow movements and quiet voices. The parrot will learn to take his cues from you.
4. You and your husband have great power to change the parrot's behavior toward your children. Show your parrot that you love and value your kids and they are valuable members of your flock. Make it clear that you are horrified that the parrot has misunderstood their importance in your lives. It is not his place, after all, to decide who should live in your home.
5. Help your kids to have fun interaction with the parrot. Trick training can be done from outside the cage, so everyone feels safer. Trick training is a win-win situation, with people and birds earning lots of reinforcement. Humans learn to communicate more clearly, birds earn lavish rewards, and everyone earns extravagant praise. What can be better than that?
6. Teach your parrot that aggression is no longer necessary. According to Dutch avian veterinarian Jan Hooimeijer, DVM, observation of wild parrots indicates that natural flock communication does not include violence. Companion parrots learn to bite humans because more natural communication channels are not open to them.

Careful observation of parrot body language teaches humans to recognize the precursors to aggression, and avoiding hostility by stepping around the problem is a much more effective approach to communication.

7. Although I am a tremendous fan of fully flighted parrots, I am not in favor of flying attacks. If your parrot is fly and attacking your children, perhaps a slight wing-feather trim will keep your children safer while you retrain our parrot. When

he understands what types of behavior are acceptable, allow his wing feathers to re-grow.

With proper training and socialization, parrots need not behave like tyrants in their homes. When they are not given proper directions and taught limits on their behaviors, they do what is easiest to accomplish their goals, often resorting to aggression to fulfill their needs. Biting is, after all, so effective!

Clear communication and consistency in handling can offer more peaceful alternatives, and improve relationships with all the people in the environment.