

## Children and Birds: 10 Dos & Don'ts

### **Make bird ownership a family affair**

*By Laura Doering*

Read books and magazines on bird-care with your child.

1. Do realize that although some birds, such as budgies (parakeets), may be relatively inexpensive when compared to a dog or cat, they still deserve routine veterinary care, proper food, housing and enrichment, as well as consistent socialization.
2. Don't think of a bird as a "practice pet" for a child. Most companion birds have long lifespans, and they can also be more challenging to care for in terms of cage cleaning, basic training and interaction.
3. Do think of a pet bird as the family's pet instead of the child's pet. Parents must be willing and able to help out to ensure that the bird receives proper care, including veterinary visits as needed.
4. Don't allow your child to forcibly interact with a bird that would prefer to be left alone.
5. Don't allow your child to torment the bird by sticking his or her fingers in the cage or grabbing at the bird. This type of forced interaction is likely to make the bird phobic of hands and fingers, and your child might be bitten in the process.
6. Do supervise your child when he or she interacts with the bird. Demonstrate the proper way to get a bird to step up onto a hand or perch, and how to read a bird's body language.
7. Don't allow the bird to be taken outside on the child's shoulder or hand unless the bird is accustomed to wearing a bird-safe harness. Even birds that have had recent wing-feather trims can still fly, especially cockatiels. Place the bird in a bird-safe carrier instead.
8. Do encourage your child to feed the bird fresh vegetables and healthy treats.
9. Don't expect a young child to remember to clean the bird's food bowls, change the cage liner and replenish food daily.
10. Do foster your child's interest in birds by reading bird-care books and magazines with them, taking them to aviaries and joining a bird club.