

Children & Budgies: Best of Buddies

Budgies can make great pets for children, as long as a few simple rules are followed.

By Sue Anderson

Budgies (also sometimes erroneously called parakeets in the U.S.) are the most popular pet bird in the world. They are small, cute, inexpensive, and they talk or chatter a lot. Most of the people I know who have larger parrots started out with a budgie, usually when they were a child.

Should Your Child Have A Budgie?

Yes, as long as: The child is willing to help take care of the pet budgie. The child is old enough to understand that pet birds can easily be frightened by quick movements. The child is patient enough to work with the pet budgie. You, as the parent, are willing to assume the ultimate responsibility for the life of the pet budgie.

Next Generation

When my daughter was growing up, we had budgies. There were two we remember with great fondness: Babe and Freebie. Babe was feisty and totally devoted to us. He followed us all over the house, said a few words and bravely sat on anything we put him on. He had no fear.

Freebie was our next budgie. He was shyer than Babe, but still very sweet and tame. He was a better talker, too. This had a minor downside. Elizabeth, my daughter, was in junior high school then, and she and her friends taught Freebie to swear. I had no idea they were doing this until I came home one day and said hi to Freebie. His response was very rude, to say the least.

Elizabeth and I shared taking care of our birds. Sometimes, if reminded, she would clean the cage and give the bird food and water. If she did not, then I did. I felt very strongly that, since I was the adult, it was up to me to make sure that the bird was taken care of.

A Child's First Bird

I'm not alone in my positive recollections of budgies.

Parent and budgie owner Melissa Adams wrote, "We got Sunshine a year and a half ago when my daughter, Nora, was 10. She absolutely adores him! He was a little over a year old when we got him and hadn't had much attention paid to him by his previous owner. It only took a couple of days, though, for him to warm up to us. We're patiently working with him to step up on our fingers, but he isn't ready to do that yet. He always comes over to us (especially to Nora) when we approach the cage to do some nose-to-beak talking ... He also eats from our hands. He's so sweet. We've never had a rule that Nora had to be the one to take care of him — he's a family pet. I clean his cage, we share in his feeding, and Nora certainly pays lots of attention to him.

"For a science project at school, Nora observed Sunny's behavior for two weeks, did some research on budgies and wrote a report on him. At the time she presented the report to the class, she actually got to take him to school.

"Sunny brings us so much joy. We also have two dogs, and Nora has a fish and a newly acquired hamster, but Sunny has a very special place in her heart."

Pet Bird-Friendly Activities For Your Child

Many local bird clubs have special programs for children. Attending meetings will give your child the opportunity to meet other children who have birds and learn more about them.

Trips to the pet store or the zoo will help your child learn how different the bird species can look and act. Make these trips before purchasing a bird to gauge your child's true interest in a pet bird.

Read books and magazines about birds with your child. Quiz your child on the facts you read and have your child identify different bird species.

Measuring Responsibility

Should every child have a pet budgie? It depends on the age and maturity level of the child. A 12 year old and up can

likely handle the responsibility of taking care of a bird, but it will depend on the individual kid. If your child is under the age of 12 (or still a little immature), the parent should be prepared to step in if their youngster does not provide the proper care and attention to its budgie. Even a good child can become distracted. If you buy your child a budgie, you are responsible for its well-being. This includes taking the pet bird to the vet when it's sick. There are people who believe that because budgies are cheap and vet visits are expensive, it's easier to just replace the bird than to try to cure it. This fosters the attitude that living things are replaceable and not important, which negates the value of having a pet to begin with.

Remember too that unless the budgie is worked with, it will not become tame or talk and may wind up doing nothing more than sitting in its cage. This is not good for either the child or the bird.

Parents also need to understand that things can change. Budgies can live a long time. The parent may wind up with a pet budgie when the child grows up and goes to college. If you are not willing to take the responsibility, don't get your child a pet.