

Dear Dr. Wise,

Question: The parakeet I had for eight years died. My bird provided me many hours of enjoyment and companionship. I taught him to talk and he'd fly around the room and sit on my arm. My grandsons gave me a new parakeet for Christmas. He is so different – he bites, turns up his wings like he's mad and chews up the gravel paper. Why does he do this? I gave him a variety of seeds and plenty of toys.

Answer: With such pleasant memories of your last bird, you are understandably concerned about the behavior of your new pet. I think your new one will become a fine pet once you work with him for awhile. I'll tell you some things you can do, but first let me say that results may be slow if your bird is old and set in his ways.

Someone once said that the way to a bird's heart is through his mouth. Keeping this principle in mind will help you "educate" your new pet. A hungry bird will be a friend to the person who feeds him. That friendly bond can develop.

Begin by approaching your parakeet in an upbeat manner with food in your outstretched fingers. If you feed him two meals a day, he will be hungry and more open to "therapy." Try each time you approach him to have a very small tidbit to offer him as a peace treaty. Progress will be slow, but as you turn him into a pampered pet, he will become very responsive to you. He may even "talk" like your last bird.

I have some suggestions for his diet. You need to vary his all-seed menu to provide more balance. Seeds alone do not give him all the nutrients he needs. Either use a pellet food or, since he's been used to seeds, try a pellet/seed bar or cake for awhile.

Birds love to be in the middle of the action in you house. They also like to look down on people so that they can feel like they are the "king of the roost." Place your bird's cage no lower than eye level but make sure that he is not in a draft. He also will love as large a cage as possible with a spot in it where he can retreat and not be seen. Finally, he will be more comfortable if you cover the cage at night.

If you have questions about your pet, write to Dr. Wise, 201 S. Capitol Ave. Ste # 405, Indianapolis, IN, or www.invma.org.