

Teaching Children to be Rabbit People

Rabbits are rarely a good choice for a child younger than 7 years. The natural exuberance, rambunctiousness, and decibel-level of the average toddler is stressful for most rabbits. Children want a companion they can hold and cuddle; rabbits need someone who understands that they are ground-loving creatures.

Whether you have brought a baby home to your rabbit's house or have brought a rabbit home to your child's house, it is well to remember to:

- Learn about rabbit behavior/language so you can point out the rabbit's feelings about your child's actions.
- Choose a time of day when your child is on "low ebb" for teaching your child about the rabbit and for play with the rabbit.
- Set your child and the rabbit up for success. Try to anticipate and prevent inappropriate interaction by showing your child how to interact.
- Try not to get into a pattern of always saying "Don't..." and "Stop..." to your child about the rabbit. If your child does something inappropriate, show and talk about what the child can do with the rabbit. Offer choices for behavior and ask "What could you do...?" Otherwise, your child may see the rabbit as something he is always getting in trouble for.
- Keep the child away from the rabbit for a short time if the child refuses to stop a behavior that may hurt the rabbit. **Although unintentional, toddlers are capable of doing real harm to a rabbit.**
- Make sure the rabbit has a space where he can go and the child can't follow.
- Put the rabbit in a closed-off room when there are lots of playmates or parties. It is often better if the guests don't know the rabbit exists.
- Refrain from having children's friends in to "see the new rabbit" for the first week or so.
- Show children's friends where rabbit lives and how to pet at times when only 1 or 2 friends visit, then make sure the rabbit is safe, and the children supervised during the visit.