

# SO, YOUR FAMILY IS THINKING ABOUT GETTING A RABBIT

At House Rabbit Society, we believe rabbits are wonderful companions, but they're not for everyone. If you've never had a rabbit before, we recommend fostering first. It's a great way to see what it's like taking care of a rabbit and whether they're a good fit for your family and lifestyle before you make a 10+ year commitment to adopt.

## Rabbits & Children

*Can rabbits and children get along? **Yes—but there are a few caveats!***

Many people are surprised and then disappointed to learn that rabbits rarely conform to the cute-n-cuddly stereotypes in children's stories. While rabbits enjoy being pet, most of them prefer to remain on the ground. As prey animals, rabbits instinctually feel frightened when picked up. As a result, they will often kick and struggle, which can result in hurting themselves or even the child holding them.

The natural exuberance, rambunctiousness, and decibel-level of the average toddler is stressful for most rabbits. Bunnies are naturally inclined to either run away or try to bite when approached too quickly and too loudly, and it's common for frequently stressed-out rabbits to develop related illnesses. Children want a companion they can hold and cuddle; rabbits need someone who understands they are ground-loving creatures. For these reasons, many children, especially young children, will find it difficult to interact with a rabbit and often lose interest after a few weeks, which is why we typically recommend rabbits for older children.

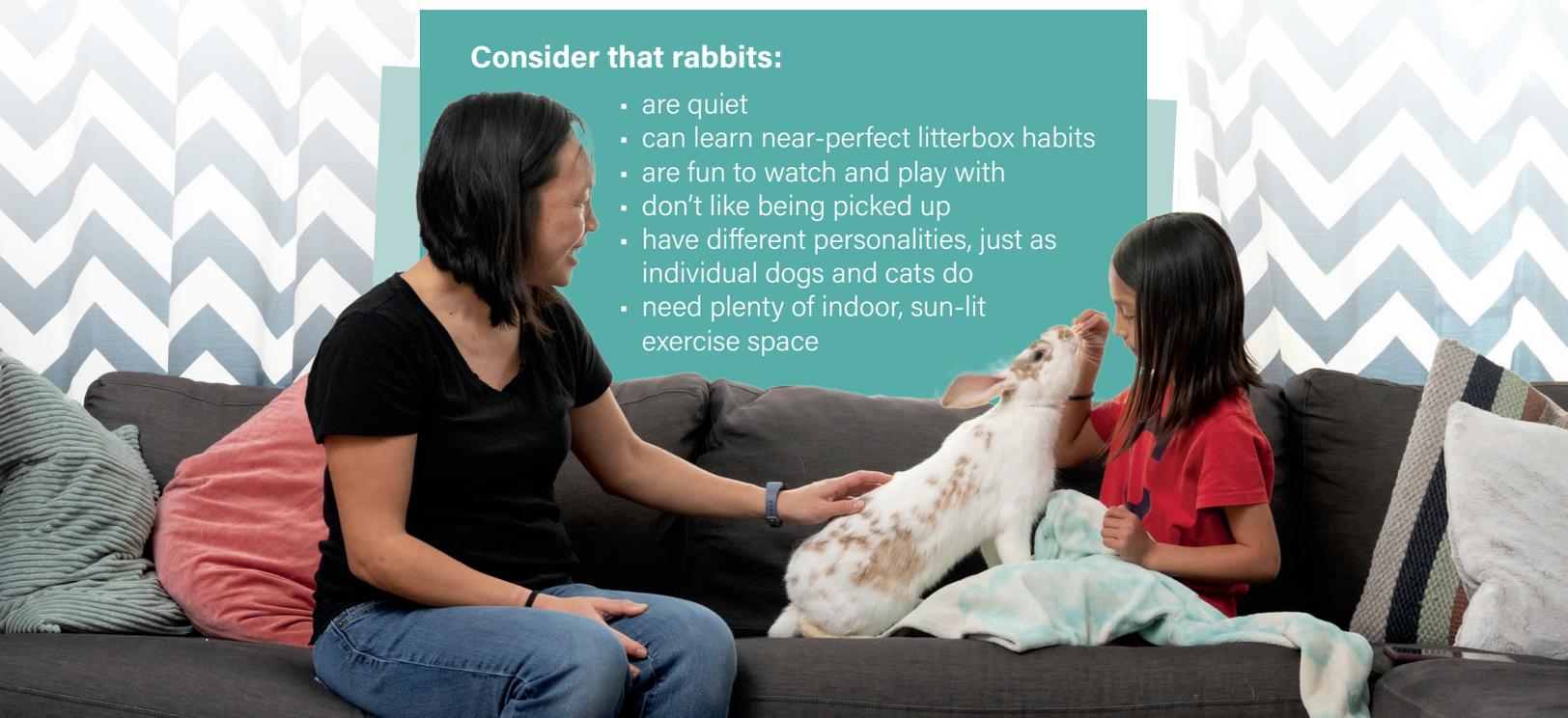
If your child is generally easygoing, calm, gentle, and cooperative, you may enjoy having a rabbit as a member of the family. If your child is generally on the loud side, very active, tends to interact physically/aggressively, or frequently seems to need reminders about rules, they may find it difficult to build a relationship with a rabbit. In those instances, you may find a rabbit is an additional stress in your home for everyone involved.

Learning about rabbits before bringing one home can be a fun family activity! Set your child and your future rabbit up for success by showing your child how to interact safely and kindly with a rabbit. See the opposite page for some great tips.

Many bunnies enjoy being with people, but your family must have patience, understanding, and an acceptance of individual differences to earn their trust.

### Consider that rabbits:

- are quiet
- can learn near-perfect litterbox habits
- are fun to watch and play with
- don't like being picked up
- have different personalities, just as individual dogs and cats do
- need plenty of indoor, sun-lit exercise space



# GETTING TO KNOW YOUR NEW RABBIT

Rabbits are social animals! They need relationships to thrive. One of the most important relationships a rabbit will ever have is with their caregiver. This foundational relationship will determine the quality of a rabbit's life. You may be asking yourself "how do I build a relationship with my rabbit?" If you've only had a cat or a dog before, rabbits can seem mysterious. Unlike dogs and cats, both predator species, it takes a more deliberate investment on your part to build a trusting, loving relationship with a prey animal like a rabbit. A bunny may start out as shy, afraid, very independent, or hesitant to trust you. It's up to you to build trust and a mutual understanding with these sensitive, intelligent animals. Once established, you'll find having a connection with your rabbit to be mutually satisfying and incredibly rewarding.

So where should you begin? First and foremost: get on your rabbit's level—compared to a human, rabbits are small! We're like giant giraffes to them, and most of the time, it's our feet and legs in their field of view. It's hard to build a connection with a pair of legs! To start getting to know your rabbit, you've got to get on the same level. Sit or lie down on the floor. If the floor won't work for you, bring your rabbit up on the sofa or bed with you.



**Be patient, don't rush.** It can take a while for a rabbit to adjust to a new home, with new people, new sounds, and new smells. It's a lot for a small animal to get used to. We recommend keeping your rabbit in a high-traffic area like a living room or kitchen so they can have lots of interaction with you.



**Speak softly.** Those big ears are good at conveying sound! Rabbits seem to enjoy listening to humans as long as your voice is soft and gentle. Try reading a book or news article out loud to your rabbit—this also helps them get used to you, too.



**Let your rabbit come to you.** Rabbits are naturally curious. If you're quiet and patient, they will come over to inspect you. Resist the urge to pet them right away. Let them explore you first and learn you're a friend, not a threat.



**Give a few small treats as you're getting to know each other.** Small pieces of carrot or apple are delicious offerings a rabbit will appreciate. You can also try feeding your rabbit their daily greens, piece by piece, which can be a fun activity for both of you!



**Play with toys together.** Most rabbits are playful, and some games are great for two. Stacking cups, plastic baby keys, and wooden blocks are fun for tossing and knocking over.



**Safely handle and hold your rabbit.** Bear in mind rabbits generally don't like being held. Rabbits are ground-dwelling animals who naturally fear being lifted off the ground by predators. Although they don't like to be picked up, most rabbits like physical affection, and enjoy having their ears, cheeks, and the bridge of their nose pet.

**Each rabbit has a distinct and different personality.** It's up to you to help your rabbit blossom into the rabbit they were meant to be. Many rabbits have BIG personalities. Some are easygoing and relaxed, some are active and demand attention, some are affectionate and engaged, some are fearful and territorial. Bonding with your rabbit will help you learn about and appreciate your rabbit's unique personality. A rabbit won't ever be a cat or a dog. A rabbit is their own special creature with many gifts to share with you.

