



Are Rabbits Good Pets for Children?

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Idyllic images of children and rabbits are very common in our culture; the greeting card industry has been instrumental in distributing such images to a much wider audience, as have photographers who use live rabbits as props in children's Easter portraits.

But parents (or grandparents) who are considering a rabbit as a child's pet should carefully examine the relationship between rabbit and child before bringing that cute baby bunny home.

Contrary to Easter-time hype, rabbits are rarely a good choice for a small child (younger than seven years).

House Rabbit Society website

If you are considering adding a pet rabbit to your family—particularly if a young child is intended to be the primary caregiver—there are several things you should consider:

- Rabbits' wild ancestors are prey animals, making their whole outlook on the world different from that of cats and dogs (natural predators). This outlook means that rabbits tend to frighten easily, and their trust has to be earned.
- Rabbits prefer the security of the ground/floor, and few rabbits like being carried around.
- Rabbits have very fragile skeletons and (in spite of their agility) cannot always "land on their feet" as cats can. Spinal injuries in rabbits are all-too-common.
- A frightened or agitated rabbit can bite or scratch a small child.



This stock photo was found on a blog with the accompanying text: "Rabbits make wonderful pets especially for young children." NOT SO! The bunny in this picture is a likely candidate for a broken back. A child this age should stay with a stuffed toy for about six more years.

When Can a Rabbit/Child Household Work?

- When the parents have done advance preparation, including preparing the rabbit's living space and researching rabbit care
- Children in the home are not especially loud or hyper-active
- Common-sense ground rules are established and followed
- The parents take the primary role in the bunny's care and teach by example more than delegation

Rabbits and Children: Some Words of Caution

Our culture is so filled with images of children and rabbits together (think the Easter bunny and Peter Rabbit) that many parents see rabbits as low-maintenance starter pets for kids. Nothing could be further from the truth. Rabbits are physically delicate and fragile, and require specialized veterinary care. It's true that children are naturally energetic and loving, but "loving" to a small child means holding, cuddling, or carrying an animal around—precisely the things that frighten most rabbits. Rabbits can't cry out when distressed. Instead, they may start to scratch or bite to protect themselves from well-meaning children. Thousands are abandoned at animal shelters every year for this reason. Many rabbits are also dropped accidentally by children, resulting in broken legs and backs. While a rabbit may be a great pet for your family, an adult should be the primary caretaker.

ASPCA website

Whether consciously or unconsciously, many people seem to think of rabbits as "lesser" animals as compared with cats or dogs, and to provide a standard of care they would never consider adequate for another pet.

It's important to understand that rabbits are living, sentient creatures; they feel hunger, pain, fear, loneliness as a dog or cat (or human) would.