

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

TEACHING RABBIT CARE, EMPATHY, AND RESPONSIBILITY

A graduate project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the degree of Master of Arts in Education,

Educational Psychology

By

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## ABSTRACT

### TEACHING RABBIT CARE, EMPATHY, AND RESPONSIBILITY

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Acclimating and housetraining a new rabbit should be approached in an organized and efficient manner. Due to the lack of instructional guides for rabbit housetraining currently available, new rabbit owners do not have adequate housetraining resources. Lack of proper housetraining instruction, leads to un-socialized rabbits, who do not receive the essential veterinary care they need for survival, and frustrated owners who are not experiencing the immense joy of rabbits as companion pets. Examples of human-animal interactions, and care ethics, with relevance to companion animal housetraining are included in a review of literature, supporting the design and development of this guide. *Bringing Bunny Home: A Guide for Housetraining Your Newly Adopted Rabbit*; is an instructional guide, addressing the different phases of housetraining. Basic instructional content within specific chapters is presented to the reader, accompanied by author anecdotes, examples of best practice, chapter quizzes, and summaries. The goal of *Bringing Bunny Home* is to inform and instruct new rabbit owners about how to understand, relate, and physically care for their new rabbit.

## **Chapter One - Introduction**

### **Introduction**

Rabbits make wonderful animal companions in the home. But contrary to popular belief, they are not “low maintenance” pets. Rabbits are often portrayed as cute fluffy animals that live in a cage, aside from the times that they are taken out to be held or watched hopping around a garden. The reality of rabbit ownership is much different than this, and rabbits’ individual personalities are widely varied as well. A happy, healthy rabbit is a long-term commitment. New rabbit owners, prior to bringing home a bunny, need to be given accurate information about preparing and caring for a new bunny.

Before adopting a rabbit, a prospective owner should be considering whether he/she could provide everything a new bunny will need. A rabbit’s life span is approximately 7-10 years, and during this time essential needs can change dramatically. A rabbit living in a safe, rabbit-friendly home environment can be sturdy, and rambunctious. However, a rabbit’s diet needs, and skeletal frame are delicate. Mistakes as simple as handling a new rabbit incorrectly can be fatal. For this reason, and many others, it is of paramount importance for new rabbit owners to quickly learn the basics of rabbit care.

### **Need/Problem**

Rabbits as indoor companions are increasing in number, and enthusiastic communities of rabbit owners can be found across the country, and around the world. In the context of veterinary medicine, rabbits are considered exotic animals. Veterinarians who regularly see rabbits in their practice are Doctors of Veterinary Medicine with specialized training in the subspecialty of Exotic Animal Medicine

(Saunders, 2011). Although exotic animal specialists are thoroughly trained in the medical care of traditional pets, like cats and dogs, the same cannot be said about veterinarians who lack exotic medicine training. Until recently, the lack of veterinarians trained in rabbit care greatly contributed to owners being unable to find local and urgent care for their rabbits, and also hindered the available clinical findings and ability to report conditions most commonly found in domestic rabbits as companion pets (Klaphake & Smith, 2002). Exotic animal veterinary practices in the U.S. have grown noticeably since 2000 (McNeill, 2000), and are the most common and sought after source for published literature contributions and case studies in the field of small animal medicine (Saunders, 2011). Rabbits are wonderful companion pets, and owners educated about the health management needs, and financial obligations for rabbits, is basic responsible pet ownership. (Hess, Biascoechea, Brazelton, Figueroa-Diaz, Klaphake, et al., 2011).

Thousands of rabbits in the United States are condemned to endure unhealthy, neglectful living conditions due to inexperienced owners who do not understand or research the basic dietary needs and daily enrichment activities needed by a rabbit. The House Rabbit Society (HRS, 2013c), the largest global non-profit rabbit welfare organization, has issued monetary grants for the purpose of emergency rescue, and/or urgent medical care for rabbits. More than 700 rabbits have been helped by HRS grants in the United States in 2013. At the end of 2012, the number of rabbits rescued through House Rabbit Society Emergency Grants (HRS, 2013a) became indeterminable, due to the large scale of rabbit rescues that occurred throughout the year across the U.S. in combination between shelter, humane, and foster organizations. At the time of this project, the six LA Animal Services shelters (LA Animal Services, 2013), serving Los

Angeles County have an intake record of 1,067 rabbits from the fiscal year 7/2012 - 8/2013. In the U.S. approximately 130 independent rabbit rescue and foster groups are shelter partnered or respected allies of rabbit welfare. Independent rabbit rescue organizations worldwide total more than 50 in 2013.

While many people think of pet rabbits as low maintenance, quiet creatures, responsible rabbit owners know that rabbits are commonly prone to specific health conditions that require medical supervision and immediate intervention. The statistics in the prevalence of certain commonly encountered and studied health issues in rabbits have mainly been linked to the ongoing crises of poor rabbit breeding and owner neglect (Saunders, 2011). In order for rabbits as companion animals to thrive, they must be able to satisfy their natural behaviors, and socially interact in their domestic environment. As new rabbit owners quickly learn, rabbits once content in an environment, gleefully allow their personalities to guide their behaviors. While a happy, healthy rabbit is the desired outcome for all rabbits living as pets, maintaining a rabbit's health can be a high-maintenance costly situation. Maintaining a rabbit's health is a delicate balance consisting of correct diet, exercise, and diagnostic care (Cromwell-Davis, 2007). Medical problems commonly encountered in pet rabbits are congenital abnormalities in teeth and jaw, and gastrointestinal stasis due to poor diet (McNeill, 2000).

Dental abnormalities and dental disease represent the highest rate of morbidity and mortality in pet rabbits (Jekl & Redrobe, 2013). The prevalence of dental disease in pet rabbits, suggests that other factors within the intricate skeletal and metabolic system of the rabbit may play an important role in the onset of dental diseases, combined with other commonly presented health concerns specific to rabbits, such as selective feeding. The

majority of rabbits seen by veterinarians are rabbits that have been rescued and re-homed. Rabbit veterinarians in their practices are regularly seeing subtle variations in rabbit tooth and jaw irregularities and disease, resulting in this common yet severe rabbit health concern (Jekl & Redrobe, 2013). Therefore dental and related health issues, most of which require surgery and daily drug therapy, have become one of the most common causes of shelter relinquishment and rabbit mortality.

As stated earlier in this chapter, many rabbits are impulse buys because they look cute and cuddly. When the novelty wears off, and the rabbit begins to display obvious needs, the rabbit becomes disposable. Lucky rabbits end up in animal shelters, where the chances of rescue and re-homing are high. Less fortunate rabbits are abandoned outdoors to fend alone. Others are left to suffer an un-socialized, shortened lifespan. Organizations trying to gain public attention toward the ongoing plight of rabbits have also brought to attention, the issues within rabbit sales and ownership that are not regulated by law, ordinance, or good business practices.

Veterinarians with exotic animal practices report that owners of non-traditional pets, like rabbits, are representative of pet owners with common characteristics (Klaphake & Smith, 2002). As prey animals, rabbits and other small mammals mask illness. Therefore, owners who seek care for their exotic pets are generally well informed about their pet's health and are highly attentive to inconsistencies in their pet's normal behavior that can be indicative of disease. Owners of exotic pets are commonly confronted, not only with the scientific limits in small animal medicine, but in the case of rabbits, a large population of animals that have illness and abnormalities stemming from neglect, rather than from congenital origin (Jekl & Redrobe, 2013).

Rabbits are the third most abandoned animals in the United States. The scope of research into the dynamics of rabbit sheltering and re-homing is consistently in flux, due to the high rates of homeless rabbits that are now being accounted and recorded (Cook & McCobb, 2012). Responsible rabbit owners are keenly aware of the common unethical treatments of rabbits that are bred for sale, sold by pet stores, and given as prizes in fairs and other public venues (DVM, 2012). The active presence of global rabbit awareness has helped states, counties, and local authorities, to rapidly create laws and ordinances specific to the welfare of rabbits. As in most animal protection practices, regulation of law is relegated to local authorities to be enforced, which provides for at least minimal rabbit welfare supervision in areas where legal measures have not yet been implemented.

Currently, the protection of rabbits through retail sale has prevented large-scale pet store franchises from piloting programs that sell rabbits because the laws vary so radically in region. Large cities, in which rabbit welfare organizations have a visible presence, are currently making great strides against the practice of rabbits being bred for retail sale. In 2013, the City of San Diego joined Los Angeles and San Francisco in city law, banning the sale of rabbits in retail pet stores. Other large states, like Texas, have laws in at least five of their major cities, banning the sale of rabbits in public venues. Two national pet store chains, Petco and Petsmart (Eckstein, 2007), only began phasing out retail rabbit sale programs in 2009, due to pressure from local animal-control agencies and rabbit foster groups. Documented statistics regarding the outcome of store bought pets, consistently validate that purchasers often do not have adequate knowledge of how best to feed, houstrain, or handle a specific type of pet (Eckstein, 2007). For rabbits, this outcome leads to the development of behavioral problems, malnutrition,

muscle atrophy, and disease. Most rabbit rescue scenarios include documented deliberate abuse, which has become a major welfare issue within rabbit protection laws (HRS, 2013b).

Although state laws can ban retail sales of rabbits, and/or require pet stores to offer only adoptable rabbits from shelter, humane, and foster groups in non-profit practices, these measures do not protect rabbits that are commonly given away as prizes at fair and carnival sites. Ordinances in place for un-weaned newborns, and rabbits under the ages of 4 weeks to 2 months are widely varied, and are being passed into law in a slower rate. Rabbit protection laws are also banning the unlawful sale of rabbits in venues like flea markets, and roadside businesses (HRS, 2013b), where generally rabbits are sold without ever having received any medical or welfare care. A common topic among exotic animal specialists is the need for permits and licenses for owners to have animals with custom needs, like rabbits. This is an area of discussion for the most part, because it is increasingly clear that rabbits require knowledgeable owners and specific dietary needs to thrive (Hess et al., 2011).

Rabbits as successful companion pets require owners to be dedicated to the specific needs of the individual animal. Commonly for rabbits, this can require a large monetary commitment. Veterinarians, rabbit foster organizations, and shelter workers are the best sources to provide information, education, and other assistance to current and prospective rabbit owners. Many rabbit adoption groups have mandatory adoption protocols to ensure that rabbits are adopted only to capable guardians. Additionally, animal shelters in the US, and around the world (HRS, 2013c), have been developing assessment tools at local levels to ensure that new rabbit owners are educated about their rabbit at the time of

adoption, and require a mandatory veterinary visit within a specified time frame. Currently, these types of guidelines are in place for the purpose of rabbit welfare and also to prevent the adoption of rabbits to owners that are a not an appropriate match (Hess et al., 2011). Consequently, education for current rabbit owners is also important, especially for owners who may be overwhelmed with the care of their rabbit, but wish to be better educated in their rabbit's needs in order to keep their companion pet. The long-term goal of exotic animal welfare, and ownership of companion pets, is to create a humane connection to the essential needs of animals in general that will endure (Podberscek, 2006).

In addition to the necessity and growing demand toward research and diagnostic advancements within this veterinary specialty, knowledgeable veterinarians, rabbit welfare organizations, and rabbit owners, can work together with the hope of reducing the incidence of rabbit neglect and re-homing needs to a less critical state (Hess et al., 2011).

Many rabbit welfare organizations post information about rabbit care and housetraining for the public on the Internet. However, information via the web, although abundant, is unreliable, and should not be used as a primary instructional source for new rabbit owners. A tangible guide to follow and refer to is needed for new rabbit owners, and should be available to purchase or given to new rabbit owners prior to, or at the time of, bringing home a rabbit. The necessity of a basic rabbit-housetraining guide, with essential information and instruction that is delivered in a straightforward manner, is evident in its need by new rabbit owners. First time rabbit owners have difficulty finding unbiased guidance for the purpose of housetraining and acclimating a rabbit into their

existing household.

### **Purpose of Graduate Project**

Rabbit owners, like myself, who have rescued and cared for rabbits with multiple special needs, feel strongly about the importance of accurate education for new rabbit owners. Many years ago, after receiving my first rabbit as a gift, I began to acquire several rabbit care guides that contained a lot of general information about rabbits, but incomplete, and haphazard instructions for houstraining my new bunny. A new rabbit owner today will have a similarly difficult task in finding accurate rabbit houstraining guides, and essential enrichment information, as I experienced with my first rabbit.

Specifically addressing the behavioral issues that accompany an indoor rabbit, is not only an important part of preventing rabbits from ending up in rescues, but provides a source of education in other places where people might purchase a rabbit. An unbiased houstraining guide offered through pet stores and rabbit breeders, is a way to reach new rabbit owners, who may not realize the immense responsibility of bring home a bunny.

The purpose of creating *Bringing Bunny Home* is to provide an easily distributable guide that provides an accurate delivery of imperative rabbit houstraining information. This includes several issues relating to indoor rabbit behavioral instincts, which are generally overlooked and unmentioned in currently available rabbit care guides.

*Bringing Bunny Home* is a solution to the lack of available basic instructional rabbit houstraining guides currently available, and could be implemented nationally in all rabbit adoption environments, including animal shelters and private rabbit adoption organizations. This guide could be given to rabbit owners seeing a veterinarian for their

new rabbit's first physical check up, and could be sold through retail book stores, pet stores, and other pet product distribution businesses. This guide should also be available at the aforementioned locations as an informational tool for prospective rabbit owners.

The goal of this type of guide is to help new rabbit owners learn established instructional techniques of housetraining, and essential enrichment solutions, so that their new rabbit can successfully acclimate into a well-organized daily routine. *Bringing Bunny Home: A Guide for Housetraining Your Newly Adopted Rabbit*, is an instructional guide for new rabbit owners who wish to properly housetrain and socialize their newly adopted or rescued rabbit.

### **Transition to Next Chapter**

The following chapter will review literature relevant to the design of this project. The topics covered are: children's attitudes toward animals, animal-assisted interventions, and care ethics and animals.

## **Chapter Two - Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

This chapter is a literature review of relevant topics and corresponding studies supporting the development of *Bringing Bunny Home: A Guide for Housetraining Your Newly Adopted Rabbit*. This review begins with a brief summary of human-animal interaction, followed by the first section discussing children's attitudes toward animals. The next section demonstrates the widening field of animal-assisted intervention. The last section examines care ethics and animals. The chapter concludes with a synthesis of the literature review.

### **Human-Animal Interaction**

Studies about the relationships between humans and animals have traditionally been relegated to the disciplines of psychology and natural science (Lund, Coleman, Gunnarsson, Appleby, & Karkinen, 2006). In the last decade, multi-disciplinary studies have shown the significant benefit of bridging research from several areas of study in order to enhance methods of measurement and observation. The importance of human-animal interaction in areas of education, psychology, and companion animal welfare are relevant to societal attitudes, and demonstrates how issues relating to animals have a direct effect on society as a whole (Knight, & Herzog, 2009). Human-animal bonds are intricate and complex, and have traditionally led to social conflict and debate. These bonds have proven to be significant in human psychological health and welfare, and have become essential in creating and influencing animal rights legislature. This area of study utilizes models of motivation, teaching, and behavior, in order to focus on the human benefit from animals in the context of cognitive, psychological, and emotional interaction

(Knight & Herzog, 2009). Human-animal interactions provide foundations for teaching people to learn about animal welfare, understand emotional connections to animals, and to develop motivational strategies to improve care for companion pets.

### **Children's Attitudes Toward Animals**

Creating opportunities for students to actively incorporate animals into their curriculum based lessons, grants students accessibility to explore the animal-human dynamic by studying nature, practice writing, and interacting with animals in a non-threatening environment (Curry, Sumrall, Moore, & Daniels, 2008). Research has shown that incorporating Animal-assisted programs (Friesen, 2010) into the classroom provides a positive influence, and an interactive environment for students to be motivated to learn about issues related to reasons and consequences of the humane treatment of others, including animals. Live animal interaction teaches children empathy, responsibility, and how to properly care for animals.

The following studies show the instructional and motivational value of live animal interaction in classrooms. Classroom animal welfare has evolved to meet specified humane standards and guidelines. In the cases of these studies, the animals were heavily supervised by project researchers, and were either housed in specific habitats, brought to children for short intervals, or owned and regularly cared for by teachers and other school personnel.

Children's attitudes toward animal themed learning was evident in a study conducted by the RODENTIA project (Fonseca, Franco, Brosseron, Tavares, Olsson, et al., 2011), a longitudinal interventional program, which promotes the humane use of a 'classroom pet', by helping primary school students develop scientific reasoning and

positive attitudes toward animals. The ‘classroom pet’ in the project, consists of a small group of female rats, which are kept in a specifically designed classroom habitat, demonstrating and adhering to proper humane conditions for animals. Students are responsible for basic maintenance of the habitat, and are engaged in lessons directly related to the RODENTIA project pet. The study confirms that students are intrinsically motivated to act responsibly toward animals, when they are given a controlled environment in which to learn about the classroom pet. Research also showed that motivation to learn about one animal motivates students to learn about other animal species, to apply similar learning strategies, and apply knowledge about care and concern. Outcomes of the study showed positive responses to animals through interaction, responsibility for care, and motivation to self-direct in order to learn about animals through other instructional resources. The RODENTIA model is based upon evidence from other motivational measures, validating that children tend to have an inherent emotional attachment to animals, and that children-directed educational programs, combined with an instructional animal applications, can have a positive effect on one’s social development that continues to evolve through maturity (2011).

A study involving human-animal interactions was created (Hummel, & Randler, 2011), in order to measure, if students in middle school, perform better in achievement tests when exposed to teaching about an animal species living in the classroom, or watched on film through presentation, versus teaching topics to students without relation to animals. Also measured was whether there are associations in motivation variables and achievement, based on an animal lesson component. The study was comprised of 599 pupils, representing a control group, live animal group, and film group. The analysis of

the study showed that students exposed to an animal based lesson lasting 90 minutes, whether live or via film, learned significantly more than the control group. Interestingly, both live animal, and film presentation groups, both showed significant increase in knowledge measured against the control group, which was not predicted, based on prior research which demonstrates significant increased knowledge in students from live animal lessons. Results indicated that students show an increased awareness for animal care, and concern about animal welfare, even in short interactions and lessons. The live animals lessons also provided implications for future studies, based on measurable increases in students self-directed work and follow up, questioning if intrinsic motivation is influenced solely by the activity of a live animal lesson. Outcomes from the study also showed that the students with live animals may have limited cognitive load capacity, in comparison to the presentation group, resulting in changes to the design of future studies (2011).

Live animal interaction in the classroom was studied from the perspective of elementary school teachers who felt strongly that classroom pets contribute significantly to children's development of responsibility, empathy, and social interaction with animals (Daly, & Suggs, 2010). A total of 75 elementary school teaching personnel participated in a research study by survey, in order to gain an understanding of teachers' attitudes about having a live animal in the classroom, and to gather information about how to incorporate a classroom pet into instruction, without a formal humane education program. Using both quantitative and qualitative methods to collect data, results indicated that live animal interaction in the classroom provides increased empathy, peer interaction, and socio-emotional development. This study found that animal interaction in general is a valuable,

and under utilized tool for instruction. Animals in the classroom provide instruction-based lessons in areas of teaching children about the numerous landscapes of care in human-animal interaction, and animal welfare. This includes animals' needs, activities, and health. Teachers who do not use classroom pets, but regularly use animal based lessons, stressed the similar benefits in elementary age students of live-animal interaction through pet visitors, zoo field trips, and on-going discussions of the experiences and personality traits of children's and teachers personally owned pets. Instructional strategies for incorporating animals into a wide variety of subject areas are implications for further study. This includes social science, creative writing, physical education, and respect for humans and animals through compassion and understanding (2010).

Children's attitudes toward animals are observable through measure. Educational teaching programs with live animal interaction have significant, and positive influence on self-directed motivation, critical thinking, and heightened awareness about the sciences, and other related disciplines. The previous three studies indicate that the presence of a live animal helps students realize their intrinsic motivation toward care, compassion, and knowledge. Implications for design considerations are that, controlled instruction, in combination with other educational resources, fosters positive attitudes toward animals. In the design of a housetraining guide, the rescue or adoption of a live animal, presents a component of motivation that has already been met, and therefore provides a basis upon which to build a framework for housetraining instruction. As explored in the previous studies, teaching about instruction of animal care is best supported by additional species-specific behavior information and other pertinent information required for success.

## **Animal-Assisted Interventions**

Affectional relationships with animals serve many purposes. Pets reduce stress, provide a sense of security and comfort, and provide a means of social inclusion.

Research has shown that both children and adults derive benefit from animal contact and ownership, and that people display physiological and psychological changes when in close proximity to non-threatening animals (Tedeschi, Fitchett, & Molidor, 2005). For these reasons, therapeutic approaches using the human-animal connection have become relevant, and are being developed for the instructional use of animal assisted interventions across different medical, school, and mental health therapy programs.

Animal-assisted interventions teach people how to regulate their emotions with assist from animal companions, and to be motivated to learn alternative methods for coping in all stages of life (2005). Animal interventions also provide skills to help people learn how to relate to animals, in order to facilitate new pet ownership.

The following three studies cover relevant research associated with implementing animal-assist interventions in high stress settings. Research includes phasing in instructional-based animal-assist programs, which allow organizations to follow strategies from similar successful animal-assist programs.

For people experiencing hospitalization, or onset of illness, animal therapies can have a special benefit. Measurable effects of the positive influence of companion animals related to chronic conditions like high blood pressure, and coronary disease, have been studied, and are examples of how human-animal bonds foster positive responses, direct outward focus, increase motivation for recovery. A study (Coakley, & Mahoney, 2009) was conducted for the purpose of determining whether Pet Therapy programs in a

hospitalized setting, improved aspects of physiological, mood, and behavioral outcomes for patients. Many hospitals incorporate complementary therapies into treatment, in order to encourage the mind-body connection for overall health. Pet therapy programs, have gained popularity as a supplemental therapy in hospital settings, but have remained an alternative therapy, due to the lack of defined instructional goals and knowledge needed to expand the evidential data for medical professionals in this area. A sample of 61 patients, ages 18 and older, in an inpatient unit, consented to have several physical and behavior measures studied. These measures included perception of pain, mood state, and adverse behaviors to the use of Pet Therapy. Time spent with the pet therapy animal, a dog, lasted approximately 10 minutes. The results of this intervention were positive, based on the measurable increased levels of motivation, engagement, and value of the experience. Results indicate that Pet Therapy for hospitalized patients has a direct relationship to short-term improvements in some health conditions, which can facilitate recovery from illnesses that are expected to be short in duration. Future studies of Pet Therapy interventions are needed to measure the long-term effects of pet visitations. Comprehensive therapy programs are needed in order to provide instructional integration into hospital settings, so that the practice of pet therapy can be measured against other evidence-based therapeutic interventions, providing critical components to the programs' favorable success (2009).

An animal-assisted therapy program study was conducted in The Gerstein Science Information Centre, a health and science library at the University of Toronto, in order to evaluate, "Paws for a Study Break" (Bell, 2013). This is an animal-assisted therapy program, which allows a trained therapy dog and its handler to hold 'office hours' in the

library, for the purpose of letting university students take a break from their studies, and provide an outlet for the psychological feelings of stress. This particular study used the Winter 2012 exam period, through a total of six visits of ninety minutes each, with a total of 417 students who participated in the study. “Paws for a Study Break”, aims to be a model for other university based instructional animal-assisted therapy programs, which are currently testing implementation strategies, instructional guidelines, and measurable outcomes of success. Methods of evaluation were varied, and included paper evaluations from student participants, collected immediately after the ‘office visit’ or completed online. Library staff members stayed in the ‘office’ room and recorded number of attendees, observations of interaction, and durations of visits. Positive predictions of the study were proven in that the popularity of the program was easily observable, through a surge in social media after announcing the pilot program to the university students. Students who rushed to visit with the therapy dog, after an announcement was made that ‘office hours’ had started, also proved the value of this program, and invalidated initial concerns that this type of animal-assisted program in an academic setting may be intrusive rather than helpful. Evaluation measures were also useful in profiling the types of students who willingly participated in the study. Although the choice of library setting was chosen to serve the type of students who would be found in the high stress environment of the health and science specialization, results indicated that only one medical student visited ‘office hours’, giving the study sound evidence that many types of students are receptive to an animal based program. The results of implementing this animal-assisted program, inclusive of steps to follow through instructional guidelines and best practices, is sound in its therapeutic affectivity from a mental health perspective. The

“Paws For a Study Break” program evaluation did not include a measure of physical change from its participants, because the program is geared to serve the student population as a whole, addressing the general symptoms of stress and anxiety demonstrated by students during preparation for exams in university settings (2013).

The use of animals to improve the emotional and functional aspects of humans is not new in its effectiveness, however most recently, research studies have indicated that animal-assisted therapeutic techniques can be implemented into many settings (Tedeschi et al., 2005), and can be aided by various species of animal including, dogs, cats, birds, horses, turtles, and rabbits. Like humans, animals have specific skills and temperaments, which can favorably influence rehabilitation, occupational, and residential settings (2005).

Animal-assisted impact in social work settings was measured for the purpose of evaluating how strongly social workers feel about the impact of animal-assisted social work practice and whether the human-animal relationship is included in intake assessments of clients (Risley-Curtiss, Rogge, & Kawam, 2013). A sample of 1, 262 professionals in the field of social work responded to a paper survey that included questions about the inclusion of animal-human relationship in practice. Results of the study and an important finding showed, social workers who see their colleagues including animal-assists, like assessments of current and past pet ownership, are more likely to also investigate adding animal-based therapeutic techniques to their practices. Research also provided evidence that social workers have the ability to promote an environment that teaches various coping mechanisms, many of which can be taught through discussions of empathy, and demonstrated in the dynamics of human and animal

welfare. Additionally, study results indicated that having a companion animal, and becoming invested in causes relating to animal welfare, are not directly related. Animal-assist interventions could be instrumental for clients who may not have had significant exposure to animals, and may not have certain coping skills learned from traditional human-animal bonds. In these cases social workers should also consider the benefit of pet ownership to their clients, as a way to practice and maintain emotional stability and feel connected to other social groups. Final discussions of the study results indicated that instructional animal-assisted programs should be included in social work settings based on need. Social workers who are not familiar with animal-assist intervention programs, have the ability and resources to ask for help from organizations trained in education or other human-centric focus, to help clients learn to positive skills of interaction, including giving and receiving emotional support through a human-animal connection. By using these types of programs social workers teach their clients about the importance of advocating for themselves and others, which is a motivational strategy regularly utilized in daily life (2013).

Animal-assisted interventions in various forms have been widely used in therapeutic settings with outcomes that provide positive results, adding to a growing body of research showing the complexities of human-animal related responses and complementary measurable outcomes (Tedeschi et al., 2005).

Implications for design considerations are that animals provide numerous positive effects and benefits for people when dealing with stress, illness, and the prevention of illness-related depression. Programs involving the human-animal bond, for the purpose of therapeutic animal-assisted intervention, need to be reliable and instructionally sound, so

that animal-assist companion animal programs can also follow instructional guidelines, in order to be favorably used for differing levels of personal need and setting. Housetraining guides should address the therapeutic benefits of giving and receiving unconditional adoration and respect from companion animals. This includes receiving optimal emotional support from pets already in the home, or bringing a new pet into a home for an owner's emotional and physical solace.

### **Care Ethics and Animals**

The giving and receiving of care enriches lives, and motivates people to express compassion and relate to others. Care can be thought of in terms of providing oneself and/or others with practical and emotional support. Care is often shaped by an emotional component, social and familial roles, and expectation. The human-animal bond adds a complexity to care by combining the dynamics of the interaction of pets in people's daily lives.

The following studies cover relevant research associated with teaching pet owners to become motivated to incorporate regular veterinary care routines for their companion pets. The motivations in pet ownership and pet health care utilization tend to be intertwined with pet ownership preferences, consumer behavior, and extensions of self (Vasegh-Daneshvary, 1993). Research findings indicate that several factors influence how pet owners view pet behavior and illness, and that personal sensitivities affected by a lifestyle, can differentiate the types of health services that pet owners seek. The following studies indicate that veterinary professionals should have instruction-based strategies to have better communication with owners, in order to teach companion pet owners the skills associated with quality pet care (1993).

Studies conducted by Bayer Animal Health (Felsted, & Volk, 2011), indicated that many pets do not receive the minimal amount of veterinary care they require, and that veterinarians should have instructional means by which to educate their clients through client communication about pets needs, educational materials, and developing standards of care in practice (2011). Researchers identified key factors which lead to less veterinary services utilized by pet owners. These factors included insufficient knowledge about their pet's essential routine exams, preventable health education, and expense of treatments. One of the key factors was that owners have an inadequate understanding of the need for routine care for their pets. Pet owners surveyed indicated, owners primarily utilized veterinary care for vaccinations and mandatory services. The study results also indicated that owners do not associate chronic illness, and disease as preventable in pets, including routine exams, which are necessary to diagnose conditions. Positive results from the study were found in owners' feeling that education about their pets' wellness from their veterinarian would motivate better care. Recommendations from the study are that veterinary exams should be an interactive experience between the veterinarian, owner, and pet. Examples given are: While examining an animal, veterinarians should explain how and why they are examining a certain part of the animal's anatomy. While commenting on the current state of the animal, veterinarians can offer their thoughts and comments, including recommendations to the owner, for the pets continued health and follow up care (2011).

A study was designed to assess the online search behavior of pet owners, and the perception of clients' use of this practice by veterinarians (Kogan, Schoenfeld-Tacher, Simon, & Viera, 2010). The effects on pet health maintenance were also investigated.

The study sample included 74 veterinary clinics in two states, which were sent veterinary surveys and client surveys. Outcomes of the study determined how online pet health information is impacting the veterinarian's role as caregiver. Clients reported high usage rates for searching online for 'pet disease' and 'medical problems', as well as to clarify information given by their veterinarian. Clients also reported feeling relieved about finding specific health information online, and felt more assured raising issues of concern with their veterinarian. Veterinarians reported that fewer than half of their clients discuss information they have found online, and given the opportunity, veterinarians would spend time with their clients discussing accuracy of found pet health information. Results of this study indicated that, although veterinarians feel the Internet is not an appropriate substitute for veterinary services, indications that pet owners who search online for information about pet health become better consumers and more compliant, and can be a strategy for making pet owners more aware of health conditions and prevention. Suggested advantages evidenced in this study were: veterinary visits with pets can have many distractions, and clients may not retain all the information given at a specific time. For this reason, Internet usage can be helpful from a veterinary perspective, allowing people to investigate and process sometimes discouraging and distressing news about their pets' health in privacy. There are organizations that specialize in helping people find accurate information about health on the Internet, but as this study evidenced, pet owners are not likely to seek help in generalized pet health searches for companion animal care (2010).

Evidence from studies indicates, when people face times of difficulty in their lives, their pets represent a sense of stability, an emotional bond that cannot be swayed by

circumstance. This includes illness, economic difficulties, and violence in the home. Research in these areas of study shows that people will endure difficult living conditions, physical and emotional abuse by others, in order to retain ownership of their pet (Tedeschi et al., 2005).

An animal fostering study was conducted in order to establish an outline of how to incorporate animal fostering programs into safe-houses in the United States (McConnell, Kogan, & Schofield, C., 2004). A study collected data to record the reasons that women, staying in a residential shelter for abuse, might not leave an abusive situation, if it meant leaving their companion pet behind. The Crosstrails animal fostering program (2004) became associated with the Crossroads Safehouse in Colorado, in order to evaluate the resources needed to establish formal animal fostering programs within safe-house settings, including the additional workload for staff that would be instrumental in coordinating both owner and animal. The program protocol consists of intake reports with the person seeking safety. Within the intake the guidelines of participation in the Crosstrails program are addressed and agreed upon. This includes retaining and/or relinquishing ownership based on the amount of time spent at Crossroads. Other guidelines of consideration are consent for animal veterinary care, owner visitation, and future plans. While in Crosstrails, animals are fostered by volunteers, which include veterinarians who offer their medical and boarding services, and individuals that offer to be the 'foster parents'. Difficulties found in design guidelines are that safe-houses do not have a steady stream of companion animal owners by which to estimate the allocation of funds, which can also cause difficulties in retaining volunteer services. Also addressed is that the safe-house staff need to be understanding and compassionate toward human-

animal bonds. Feedback from safe-house staff was extremely positive. Most of the staff had actively participated in the Crosstrails pilot programs and reported that many women in their program stated that they would not have left the abusive situation, if they could not take their pet out of the situation as well. Others stated that they would have waited for space in the Crossroad safe-house, before choosing another safety shelter without a companion animal fostering program (2004).

The Crosstrails animal foster sheltering program has participated in the fostering of dogs, cats, goldfish, pocket pets, and other various small animals (2004).

The importance of pet care health education is reflected in the measurable irregularities in studies. Research about the maintenance routines of companion animal owners, shows that skills for good practice in companion pet care are lacking in several segments of the population. Most owners do not have alternative sources of care for their pets in case of unforeseen events, which can adversely affect both owner and pet. Literature about this topic reveals that pet owners should be instructed by veterinarians and associated animal caregivers about the necessity of regular veterinary exams for companion animals, regardless of an animal's age, species, or health history.

Implications for design considerations are: Responsible pet owners do not intentionally disregard veterinary care for their pets. Many factors can influence an owner's level of care for a pet including, available veterinary specialty, price of services, and lack of knowledge about species-specific essential care. Companion animal care can also be affected by an owner's inability to provide a safe living environment for a pet in the midst of violence, abuse, or other life-changing events. Instructional housetraining guides should be designed in part to teach pet owners how to learn about finding the

proper veterinarian for their type of pets, and incorporating alternate sources of help for both routine and emergency care. Houstraining guides can incorporate instructions for identifying areas of concern for illness in animals, including changes in behavior, which can sometimes be the result of abuse from others. This type of instructional content emphasizes that owners need to be familiar with their pets' anatomy and personality characteristics, so that physical changes in their pets can be quickly recognized and treated.

### **Synthesis**

Evidence presented across several academic disciplines in many areas of literature justifies and supports the instructional design of *Bringing Bunny Home: A Guide for Houstraining Your Newly Adopted Rabbit*. Several studies show evidence of the stress reducing potential of tactile contact with an animal. Petting dogs, and other animals, reduces blood pressure and decreases anxiety, in otherwise healthy individuals (Tedeschi et al., 2005). The synthesis of relevant research studies about human-animal interaction indicates that effective instructional models incorporate a narrative of informational support, within the framework of instruction, further validating the importance of the subject matter. Research within multidisciplinary instructional strategies, specifically with regard to animals, care welfare, and good practice, demonstrates that this area of study provides valuable contributions to animal care instruction, and also insights into relevant aspects of human behavior and animals' roles in society (2005).

Animal related studies, whether directly involved with live human-animal methods or measuring only representations of animals through lessons and therapy, aim to teach that animals are not objects, and should not be treated as such.

Instructional education available to the public is the most appropriate way to reach a large demographic of people who may not have considered owning a rabbit as a companion pet. The absolute goal in rabbit welfare is to provide rabbit owners, veterinarians, and the general public, with the knowledge to better understand rabbits as a species, and garner awareness toward the rapid exploitation of abandoned and neglected rabbits. Veterinarians who regularly see rabbits in their practices (Hess et al., 2011) concur that accurate, instructional printed materials, which address an overview of a rabbits health and behavioral needs, is the optimal solution to provide education to prospective, new, and current rabbit owners. As presented in the first chapter, rabbit welfare is currently a topic of global concern (HRS, 2013c). Education regarding human-animal interaction is of the greatest importance. It is also highly relevant to the growing rabbit ownership community at large.

*Bringing Bunny Home: A Guide for Housetraining Your Newly Adopted Rabbit*, is an instructional resource specifically designed to help new rabbit owners learn how to houstrain their rabbit. Addressing the needs of rabbits, through teaching about basic houstraining skills, activities, and the accompanying issues, motivates owners to become actively involved in their rabbit's existence. The development and design of the guide is presented in the following chapter.

## Chapter Three - The Project

### Introduction

Welcoming and housetraining a newly adopted bunny into a new home is accomplished best by providing the new rabbit owner with instruction most essential to the first few days of rabbit ownership. Understanding and housetraining a bunny cannot properly be done by following numbered steps, or by introducing items in the rabbit's living environment piece by piece. In order for a smooth, bunny-to-home transition to take place, several environmental and behavioral instincts need to be addressed at the same time. Therefore, *Bringing Bunny Home* is divided into chapters for ease to the reader. However, a newly adopted bunny can only learn and explore at his/her own rate of comfort. This guide is designed for first time rabbit owners who may have adopted, purchased, or been given a rabbit.

This chapter examines the instructional model of design, components of the guide, audience implementation and outreach.

### Development of the Project

This guide demonstrates that owning and housetraining a rabbit is possible for many different types of lifestyles and households. *Bringing Bunny Home* is written for adult new rabbit owners, who may or may not have prior pet ownership. The guide offers instruction and accompanying explanations for a specific type of housing, dietary needs, and enrichment options, in order to teach new rabbit owners about the full range of rabbit owner responsibility and companionship.

## **ADDIE Instructional Design Model**

The ADDIE instructional design model was used in the development of this guide. This instructional development (ID) model follows five phases: Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation, and Evaluation (ADDIE).

The ADDIE model was the best choice for the development of *Bringing Bunny Home*, because the steps within the model are comparable with the development process that I needed to follow in order to have an organized vision throughout the development process. The phases of the ADDIE model are designed to continually build upon each other throughout the process of development, which is how this model helped in my approach to writing a concise and organized guide. As one is consistently evaluating the ongoing development of an instructional product's design, one is also re-evaluating in the finishing stages and implementing necessary adjustments or changes. The ADDIE model is best used for the development and design of instructional products that have specific learner objectives, and evidential outcomes. The ADDIE model was well matched for addressing the edification of individual instructional needs, such as instructing new rabbit owners about housetraining a rabbit.

**Model Definition and Application.** The definition of the ADDIE model of instructional design is that it is a five-phase method that manages the systematic organization of product development. Each phase leads towards the next orderly step within the development process towards completion.

The first phase of the ADDIE model is to analyze. This is a process whereby the needs of the target audience will be identified. The designer's analysis of the audience includes a clear vision of the learners' characteristics, their learning objectives, and the

determination of constraints that are presently affecting the instructional goals of a specific task, and the desired outcome or result. Analyzing the current deficiencies in available rabbit information was the first step in identifying the problems associated with housetraining a new bunny, and the needs that are arising within a growing population of new rabbit owners. While watching the behavior of my own adopted rabbits, and from my experience as a referral source for others, to aid in housetraining with new rabbits, I realized the instructional objectives, and corresponding goals, that were most crucial for new rabbit owners to learn with regard to housetraining. Adult rabbit owners are my intended target audience. This choice was made because county animal shelters and rabbit rescue groups will only allow adults to be considered for rabbit ownership. This fact determined the type of delivery option most useful for this guide.

The design step is the second phase, and includes solutions to problems identified within the analysis phase. The design phase assesses the needs and identifies the strategies that will be most successful in resolving the learner's current instructional dilemma. In addition to deciding upon the method of delivery, the categorizations of objectives are also determined within the design phase. During the design process I used the information obtained from the analysis phase to identify specific objectives to be included in my product. This included the categorizing of components to be included within chapters, balancing the amounts of information and instruction, and choosing the most user-friendly delivery mode, and packaging. The outcome of the design phase resulted in the formation of sequences of instructions, transferred into a tangible design format, whereby the needs of the learner are met. Several design elements were decided

in this phase. These elements included ease of quick reference, and new rabbit owners being able to leaf through the guide, in the midst of the first few days with a new bunny.

The third phase in the ADDIE model is to develop the instructional product. At this point, the information gathered during the analysis and design phases will allow a prototype to be developed. Within the developmental phase, problems with product materials, and the possible addition of supplemental elements needed to produce a successful product and delivery mode, can be identified and developed. This phase includes detailed timelines of development, which will result in a finished product that is ready for initial distribution. The development phase of my rabbit-housetraining guide was, as I imagined, similar to the process of authoring a semi-personal story of my experiences from housetraining with my own rabbits. While gathering and combining my objectives with other resource information to create the text, I was consistently allowing professionals within the area of rabbit care and welfare to collaborate during my progress. Writing my instructional guide became an ongoing process of adding and removing information, based on continual discussions with others, about the essentials in preventative rabbit care associated with new rabbit ownership, resulting in a completed draft version of my instructional guide.

The next phase of the ADDIE model is to implement. This refers to the supervised trial of a product, and its transition into the current instructional product market. The implementation phase assures the designer/developer that the delivery mode is satisfactory, and that it accurately meets the learners' needs and objectives. The implementation phase of my rabbit housetraining instructional guide is essentially the finished draft product included within this project. Single chapters, while being compiled,

were dispersed within the rabbit welfare community for the purpose of receiving an unbiased universal opinion of the instruction presented, and its method of delivery. I plan to present my current product to new rabbit owners, through exotic animal veterinarians and rabbit welfare organizations, in order to test out its instructional design, and to see that a concise instructional housetraining guide produces the desired result. Because of the nature of the product, I expect the implementation stage to be relatively close to the delivery of the final product to be sold and/or distributed by others.

The final phase of the ADDIE model is to evaluate the effectiveness of the instructional design. The process of evaluation is an ever-present phase within the ADDIE model, whereby two types of evaluation occur.

Formative evaluation is a process that begins in the analysis phase, and is conducted during each stage of design, in order to perform modifications to the product design as it is being developed. This evaluation involved collecting data during the instructional design phases of the guide, in order to decide what topics and instructional strategies needed to be improved or removed. Rabbit foster care group members gave early feedback to me about the topic content of the guide. This resulted in my deleting topics that were not relevant to basic instructional rabbit housetraining. Experts in rabbit veterinary care were later surveyed by questionnaire. Details from these evaluations are presented in Chapter Four.

Another type of evaluation is summative. This is the process that occurs after the instructional product has been implemented. The purpose of summative evaluation is to measure achievement of learner outcomes and gather statistical data in relation to how effective the product was in reaching its instructional goals. I plan to evaluate *Bringing*

*Bunny Home* after it has been distributed and implemented. My objectives for a summative evaluation are presented in Chapter Four.

**Product Description.** *Bringing Bunny Home* is an instructional and informational guide for basic rabbit housetraining. This includes; setting up a rabbit's living area, litter box training instructions, explanation of essential food and water delivery systems, and providing enrichment activities.

**Physical Description.** *Bringing Bunny Home* is an 8x8 spiral bound, lightweight cardstock book, printed in black and white typeface, with accompanying charts and pictures in color.

**Topic Content Outline.** Listed below is an outline of the subject matter within the guide:

- 1 A New Bunny
  - 1.2 Documenting
  - 1.3 Creating a bond
  - 1.4 Veterinary care
  - 1.5 Expectations
- 2 Understanding rabbits
  - 2.1 Prediction of behavior
  - 2.2 Owner response
- 3 Rabbit's Living Space
  - 3.1 Hutch choice/ hutch size
  - 3.2 Hutch modification
  - 3.3 Hutch set-up
  - 3.4 Hutch placement
- 4 Diet
  - 4.1 Choosing food bowls
  - 4.2 Food options
  - 4.3 Water delivery systems
  - 4.4 Salt licks and hay
  - 4.5 Eating and drinking behavior
  - 4.6 Fresh vegetables/fruit/treats
- 5 Rabbit Handling
  - 5.1 Approaching
  - 5.2 Rules
  - 5.3 Lifting

- 5.4 Holding
- 5.5 Releasing from grip
- 6 Litter Box
  - 6.1 Confined space
  - 6.2 Litter box size
  - 6.3 Types of rabbit friendly litter
  - 6.4 Cleaning and disposal
- 7 Litter training
  - 7.1 Training methods
  - 7.2 Alternate training methods
- 8 Rabbit Enrichment
  - 8.1 Rabbit friendly home
  - 8.2 Creating enrichment sources
  - 8.3 Item of security
  - 8.4 Rabbit behaviors
  - 8.5 Encouraging natural behaviors
  - 8.6 Climbing structures
  - 8.7 Setting up structures
- 9 Petting
  - 9.1 Rabbit's perspective
  - 9.2 Petting instructions
  - 9.3 Non-petting communication
- 10 Conclusion
  - 10.1 Resource referral
  - 10.2 Salutation

**Organization.** This guide contains the following components:

- Author's introduction
- Table of contents
- Components of your bunny's living area
- Dietary essentials and delivery methods
- Litter box training
- Handling your bunny
- Enrichment and behavior
- Petting concerns
- Summaries
- Charts

**Environment.** *Bringing Bunny Home* would be most helpful implemented in all rabbit adoption and purchasing environments, including animal shelters and private rabbit rescue organizations. Additionally, this guide would be given to rabbit owners seeing a

veterinarian for their new rabbit's first physical exam. *Bringing Bunny Home* could be sold through regular bookstores, pet stores, and other pet product distribution businesses, and should also be available at the aforementioned sites as an informational tool for prospective rabbit owners.

**Intended Audience.** The key to a thriving, healthy rabbit is through responsible pet ownership. The intended audience of *Bringing Bunny Home* is comprised of adult men and women, age 25 and older, who are financially stable. My audience comes from many different types of households, ethnicities, and cultural backgrounds. They are proficient in the English language, and understanding of conversational colloquialisms, in order to follow the instructional components, accompanying anecdotes, and explanations of housetraining instruction.

A well-trained rabbit is highly social and easily handled by an owner, and can be a wonderful companion, and therapeutic pet, for single and/or older adults. My target audience of new rabbit owners intends to keep their rabbit strictly indoors, and therefore have adequate indoor living space for this purpose. My audience is physically able to handle a rabbit, which is a process that involves a good level of manual dexterity, and mobility on the part of the owner. My audience is confident in their housetraining abilities, curious about rabbits as indoor companion pets, and responsible about rabbits' care and welfare.

My intended audience may not have previous interaction with rabbits; however they are motivated to learn about rabbit housetraining instruction independently, and at their own pace. My audience has a positive attitude about housetraining a rabbit. They are

creative and inspired about providing enrichment for their new rabbit, and exploring the full range of enrichment possibilities.

Lastly, my audience has a genuine interest in learning about rabbits' behavior, health, and interaction. My audience is confident in following instruction, with realistic expectations of setbacks, in order to teach their rabbit basic housetraining behaviors.

**Contents of Guide.** *Bringing Bunny Home* is comprised of ten chapters:

1. You and Your New Bunny
2. Understanding Your Bunny
3. Your Bunny's Hutch
4. Bunny's Basic Food and Drink
  - Part One - Pellets
  - Part Two - Water
  - Part Three - Salt Licks, Hay, and Extras
5. Handling Your Bunny
6. Your Bunny's Litter Box
7. Litter Training Your Bunny
8. Enrichment for Your Bunny
  - Part One - Yours, Mine, and Ours
  - Part Two - Identifying Behavior
9. Petting Your Bunny
10. Conclusion

### **Transition to Next Chapter**

Chapter Four will summarize the preceding chapters, and present formative and summative evaluations of *Bringing Bunny Home: A Guide for Housetraining Your Newly Adopted Rabbit*. Sample pages from the guide can be viewed in Appendix A.

## Chapter Four - Summary

### Summary

Acclimating and housetraining a new rabbit should be approached in an organized and efficient manner. Due to the lack of instructional guides for rabbit housetraining currently available, new rabbit owners do not have adequate housetraining resources. Lack of proper housetraining instruction, leads to un-socialized rabbits, who do not receive the essential regular veterinary care they need for survival, and frustrated owners who are not experiencing the immense joy of rabbits as companion pets. Examples of human-animal interactions, and care ethics, with relevance to companion animal housetraining are included in a review of literature, supporting the design and development of this guide. *Bringing Bunny Home: A Guide for Housetraining Your Newly Adopted Rabbit*; is an instructional guide, comprised of ten chapters, each addressing the different phases of housetraining. Basic instructional content within specific chapters is presented to the reader, accompanied by author anecdotes, examples of best practice, quizzes, and summaries. The goal of *Bringing Bunny Home* is to inform and instruct new rabbit owners about how to understand, relate, and physically care for their new rabbit. By creating a stimulating environment, a rabbit can be gently eased into his/her new home.

### Evaluation

The final phase of the ADDIE model is to evaluate the effectiveness of the instructional design. The process of evaluation is an ever-present phase within the ADDIE model, whereby two types of evaluation occur. Formative evaluation is a process that begins in the analysis phase, and is conducted during each stage of design, in order to

perform modifications to the product design as it is being developed. Another type of evaluation is summative. This is the process that occurs after the instructional product has been implemented. One of the purposes of summative evaluation is to allow the intended learners to measure outcomes and provide feedback concerning the effectiveness of the product. Additionally, through summative evaluation, the designer is able to gather statistical data in relation to how well the product helped the learners in reaching their desired goals.

**Formative Evaluation.** I consistently utilized formative evaluation during the design and developmental phases of my product. During the development phase, formative evaluation helped me to stay on track with my product's intended design concept. Opinions from others during the product's compilation process were compelling enough for me to re-evaluate aspects of design. It was determined that the guide should be shortened from hard copy version, with many more topics, to a smaller, lighter in weight, basic instructional guide. Feedback included the possibility of adding lists of supplemental foods for rabbits, and addressing enrichment activities and items for use. Myths of rabbit behavior need to be identified, as well as misconceptions about litter training and housing.

Three professionals in the rabbit care community, reviewed *Bringing Bunny Home* for the purpose of a professional formative evaluation. Three evaluation questions, viewable in Appendix B, were submitted to two exotic animal veterinarians, and a senior veterinary technician. Questions and answers from the evaluation are below:

1. How do you currently instruct new rabbit owners about housetraining, and the accompanying issues?

Evaluator A: “ In our practice we have various printed materials for clients and their pets. For rabbit information, we use a few sources online from websites that are run by people that we know and work with in rabbit related events. The rest is provided by our parent company, which contains information about rabbits and housetraining procedures that we can endorse. I don’t have any books or other materials that I specifically use or refer for housetraining. I willingly give as much information as time allows, about best housetraining practices.”

Evaluator B: “ I’m generally informed prior, or find out during the veterinary visit, how much the new owners know about taking care of their rabbit. I try to spend time during the exam writing down, and/or telling the client information and giving easy instructions, about a few general topics that are the most urgent. A lot of housetraining is trial and error based on the individual animal. Rabbits generally react well to patience, and respond in time to new situations. I can’t say that I have a system of advising, or that I would be able to automatically write down numbered instructions for housetraining an adopted rabbit.”

Evaluator C: “ I see a lot of rabbits rescued out of shelters. Shelters have their own information that they give out at the time of adoption, before signing the animal over to the new owner. I don’t know if that information is considered instructional. They also have rescue partners that they recommend for additional help, like rabbit foster groups. I don’t usually give out instruction about housetraining to owners. I’ve seen a lot of online sources for general information for rabbits, and how to train them.”

2. Are there topics that you would like to see added or removed from this guide?

Evaluator A: “ This guide is complete in topics related to domestic rabbits. I would also be interested in seeing single chapters available for use on demand.”

Evaluator B: “ I like all the topics covered in the book. I also like the way that it’s written because it gives a very personal touch to discussing issues that are important for new owners, like the health hazards of sipper bottles, and about rabbits that don’t like to be petted right away. These are issues that veterinary professionals discuss in detail, and owners should be aware of too. New owners tend to be more nervous about caring for an older rabbit, out of a shelter or from a foster group, when in fact those types of rabbits are generally well equipped for changes in routine. I would not recommend adding or removing chapters in your book at this time.”

Evaluator C: “ I was really surprised at all the information included in your guide. It covers a lot of different areas. Explaining about rabbits flipping bowls is such a good idea. It goes on all the time, and someone with a first time rabbit would have no idea what is going on, and why. At the vet clinic where I supervise, we groom rabbits every day, and we also see emergencies from owner grooming. But, this shouldn’t be an issue for someone with a new rabbit. I was going to suggest adding grooming to your guide, but I don’t want a person with a new rabbit, trying to trim their pet’s nails, or brush a rabbit that is not used to being brushed, so do not add a grooming topic.”

3. As rabbit care educators, we regularly discuss the handling techniques associated with picking up and holding a rabbit. Do you feel that the instructional content in Chapter Five, Handling Your Bunny, is appropriate for new rabbit owners?

Evaluator A: “Rabbit handling is such an important topic to discuss with new owners, and current owners. Using correct technique to handle a rabbit is always

important regardless of the situation, and the numbers of injuries related to rabbits being improperly handled is always shocking to see. As you know, all veterinary staff have their own techniques for holding rabbits due to the nature of the animal, and the difficulty of visual assessment in rabbits. You touched upon the different elements of handling, for the purpose of new owner instruction, in a responsible and informed way. The instructions in this chapter of the guide are correct, and explained well in my opinion.”

Evaluator B: “The instructions in Chapter Five are appropriate. This is not an area that is easy to instruct, even in my office practice. New owners are timid in handling. This is very common in adoptions of older rabbits, they know when someone is trying to pick them up, and can get away. In the first office visit with a new rabbit, I’m usually handling the rabbit more than the owner has, and it can look easy because I know how to predict a rabbit’s response to a physical exam. But even experienced rabbit handlers and owners know that rabbits can unexpectedly kick, and hurt themselves. ‘Remaining calm’ is the best instructional support for learning these techniques. Very pleased with the chapter.”

Evaluator C: “ In our veterinary hospital, we tightly wrap all rabbits because of easily sustained injury while handling in unfamiliar environments. This chapter is great for new rabbit owners because handling a rabbit is much easier when owners know exactly where to hold the rabbit, and also how to let it down. I support your instruction in this chapter. You explained the importance of gripping, which is true in that as long as the owner has a tight grip on the rabbit, injuries for the most part can be prevented. I’ve taken care of rabbits that really like to be held, and others that do not like to be picked up or handled in any way, so a lot of handling depends on rabbit preference. First time rabbit

owners will benefit from your instruction and they should also be aware of the dangers from kicking and nervousness on the part of the animal.”

The professional formative evaluations of this guide provided me with the acknowledgement that my guide is sound in its content, and organized in its delivery of instruction. Additionally, printed instructional guides, with limited topic content, for the purpose of basic rabbit housetraining, are not currently available in the veterinary marketplace.

**Summative Evaluation.** Summative evaluation will be valuable to me to determine the success of my guide as an effective instructional resource. This evaluation will consist of two groups of new rabbit owners. I will compare owner knowledge and rabbit housetraining skills, of those owners who used my guide, with the knowledge and skills of those owners who received rabbit housetraining from other sources. This pre and post-intervention evaluation, along with final rabbit physical assessments by a veterinarian will give me specific information about my product’s instructional effectiveness.

The difficulties I expect to encounter in my summative evaluation are related to the high numbers of rabbits that are rescued and re-homed, and have ingrained behaviors that make instructional housetraining difficult. Rabbit health issues, food aversions, and other common neglect related behaviors might present difficulty in sample size and outcome in an evaluation.

## **Future Work**

My hope is that *Bringing Bunny Home: A Guide for Houstraining Your Newly Adopted Rabbit*, will be an essential, easily obtainable source in creating a happy home, and peace of mind, for both owner and rabbit. Since most adopted rabbits carry with them a history of poor past ownership, resulting in immediate or foreseeable health and emotional issues, houstraining for many newly adopted rabbits can be challenging. I anticipate this guide to be the first, in a future series of guides, addressing rabbit houstraining from the perspective of rabbits adopted with special needs, and other niche markets in rabbit care and welfare. This includes printed guides, specifically for exotic animal veterinarians to give to rabbit owners, containing crucial information and instruction regarding first-aid for rabbits, and explanations of rabbit anatomy. Relatable anatomy education is important for rabbit owners who are caring for an injured or ill rabbit, but can also be helpful in preventative care.

The merit of publishing this guide is to help new rabbit owners learn established techniques of houstraining, and also offer alternative houstraining solutions, so that their new bunny can successfully acclimate into a well-organized daily routine. Rabbits are intelligent, social animals that offer enduring companionship and affection.

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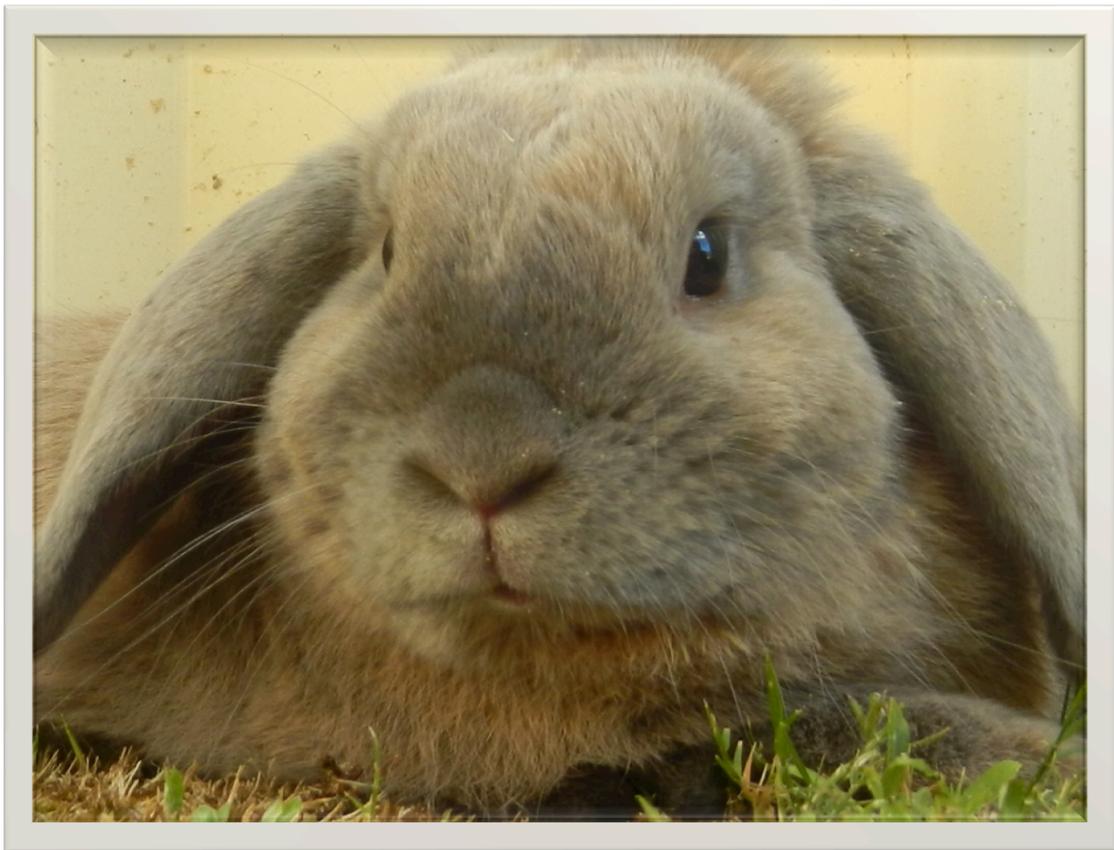
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Appendix A  
Project Sample Pages

# Bringing Bunny Home:

A Guide for Housetraining Your Newly Adopted Rabbit



by  
Meryl B Dickman

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Tristan. [rscn0284.jpg](http://pics.tech4learning.com). 21/3/2013. Pics4Learning. 26 Nov 2013 <<http://pics.tech4learning.com>>

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## **Chapter Four**

### **Bunny's Basic Food and Drink**

#### **Pellets**

**You will need: Rabbit Pellets, Fresh Water, Two Salt Licks (White Salt, Mineral Salt), and Hay (Alfalfa, Chamomile, Lavender, Oat, Orchard, Timothy).**

#### **A short discussion about rabbits and their food bowls:**

As a new rabbit owner prepare yourself for the possible scenario of your new rabbit using his/her pellet food bowl for almost every other purpose, other than for eating pellets. It might take some time for your rabbit to settle on a type of pellet bowl that is uninteresting enough for the bunny to use it only for food.

Additionally, you, as the rabbit owner, can decide where inside the hutch to place the food and water bowls. Do not be surprised, however, if your bunny has a different placement in mind. This may sound like a bit of a predicament, but it will be great fun for your bunny, and also, as a new rabbit owner, you will likely get a great glimpse into your rabbit's display of personality.

Your bunny might fling his/her bowls for fun, noise, exercise, attention, and worse case, to let you know that he/she doesn't like the bowl. It's true. I've been there.

*Leafy green and other vegetable choices for your bunny:*

*\* Supplemental fruits and vegetables are a treat*

*Napa Cabbage*

*Cucumber*

*Parsley*

*Spinach*

*String Beans*

*Beets and tops (all types)*

*Swiss chard*

*Radish tops*

*Arugula*

*Zucchini*

*Endive*

*Escarole*

*Kale*

*Turnip greens*

*Dandelion greens*

*Watercress*

*Wheatgrass*

*Chicory*

*Soy Beans*

*Radicchio*

*Bok Choy*

*Fennel (leafy tops and base)*

*Carrots and tops*

*Broccoli (leaves and stems)*

*Celery*

*Bell peppers (any color)*

*Flat pea pods*

*Brussels sprouts*

*Water chestnuts (canned)*

*Squash (all types, cooked)*

*Barley (raw, cooked)*

*Artichoke hearts (cooked)*

## **Instructions for lifting your bunny**

### **Follow these steps:**

1. Until your new bunny gets used to being lifted, you will need to learn how to pick him/her up by supporting the back of bunny's shoulders with the palm of one hand and forearm, while supporting bunny's hindquarters with the palm of your other hand.
2. The final motion will be having your bunny on his/her back, tucked in-between your forearm and chest. This should be done swiftly, and is not actually difficult.
3. Whether your rabbit has ears that are angled up from their head (Dwarf, Rex, and many others), or ears that lay down (Lop, English), once your bunny is secured tightly, with your free hand, position the ears to lie against the back of the bunny's head and neck to establish his/her sense of balance.

## Holding your bunny against your chest:



Photo Credit:

Cornes, Reuben. [img\\_6862.jpg](#). 8/2/2010. Pics4Learning. 28 Nov 2013 <<http://pics.tech4learning.com>>



## **SUMMARY**

1. Once your new bunny seems comfortable, offer your hand to be smelled, licked, and nudged. Your bunny may push or gently relax up against your hand without you even expecting it when he/she feels comfortable.
2. Most bunnies like to be stroked on the top of their head, along the ears, and on the sides of their face. Most bunnies do not like their tails, feet, or belly, petted. Every bunny has individual petting preferences, which can change over time.
3. Petting is a form of handling, which may be foreign to an un-socialized bunny. Do not feel insulted if your bunny needs to learn how to be petted. You can use verbal affection to communicate with a rabbit that is not ready to be petted. In a soothing manner, talk directly to your bunny, about whatever you please.

## **YOUR CURRENT GOALS!**

**At this point:** Your bunny is eating, drinking, playing, using the litter box, and is regularly being held by you. You are able to pet the top of your bunny's head, and stroke the sides of your bunny's face. You have tried, more than once, to pet or stroke other parts of your bunny's body.

## The Bunny Petting Chart

<http://rabbit.org/the-bunny-petting-chart/>

House Rabbit Society  
148 Broadway, Richmond, CA 94804;  
www.rabbit.org.

## *Recipe for a homemade rabbit biscuit*

*\*This is a treat*

*1 small carrot, pureed*

*1/2 banana, mashed until smooth*

*1 tbsp honey*

*1/4 cup rabbit pellets, ground finely in a coffee grinder*

*1/4 cup ground oats, ground finely in a coffee grinder*

*Mix pureed carrot, banana and honey in a medium bowl. Add pellet powder and ground oats. Mix until blended. Knead in your hands for 1-2 minutes. Roll out the "dough" in 1/8- to 1/4-inch thick layers between sheets of plastic wrap. Cut into small cookies (about 3/4 inch across). Place cut shapes onto a parchment paper covered cookie sheet or spray the cookie sheet with cooking spray. Bake at 325 degrees for about 30 minutes (check to make sure they are not browning too much). Turn off the heat and let the cookies sit in the warm oven for an hour.*

*Per your bunny's preferences, you could replace the carrot with apple, pear, or other sturdy fruit.*

