



A Commitment to Caring *Since 1899*

**Volunteer Services Department**

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## WELCOME

By becoming a rabbit foster volunteer with The Anti-Cruelty Society you provide a vital lifeline for bunnies who are not ready for adoption room placement, as well as those who may have already been waiting for adoption for an extended period of time. Rabbits are the third most frequently relinquished pet at the Society, which is why having a rabbit foster team is vital! The individual love and care fosters like you provide gives rabbits an opportunity to flourish in a warm home environment, rather than in the shelter.

Being a rabbit foster parent is a rewarding and gratifying experience. With the extra attention and socialization, animals that are fostered are more likely to be adopted into permanent, loving homes. Thanks to foster volunteers like you - we temporarily house over 350 animals in the program each year and this number continues to grow!

In an effort to better the foster volunteer experience we have created the following manual to best serve your needs. In it we address questions and concerns that you may have while fostering with The Anti-Cruelty Society. The contents also include specific information regarding animal care and shelter policies – please be sure to review these carefully. We have also created a “Foster Resources” page on our website to provide you with additional materials, videos and educational articles at [www.anticruelty.org](http://www.anticruelty.org).

Thank you again for choosing to join this life-saving program. We’re excited to have you on this team!

## FOSTERING RABBITS

The Anti-Cruelty Society foster program offers a unique opportunity for people in the community to get involved and help animals in need. Foster volunteers provide an animal with the individualized care and attention they need to be ready for placement with a forever family. Foster periods vary from a few weeks to a couple of months, but the impact on the person and pet lasts a lifetime.

### PROGRAM OBJECTIVE

The goal of volunteers within The Anti-Cruelty Society’s foster program is to provide a warm and nurturing environment in which shelter animals can flourish and prepare for placement in their forever homes. The Anti-Cruelty Society provides all foster animals with full veterinary care through our on-site clinic, and support from our behavior specialists. Foster volunteers are asked to supply food, toys, bedding, and the tender love and care an animal needs to become ready for their adoptive home.

Animals are nominated for foster candidate status by our team of on-site behavior specialists and veterinarians. Our staff provides foster volunteers with direction on what care is needed for each individual animal and an estimate of how long the animal will be in their homes. Foster parents are notified of an animal’s availability for placement through our official [Foster Candidate page](#), which is updated by staff members several times each week. Our foster support team also provides regular check-ins with foster parents that have animals in their care, providing an opportunity for them to ask questions about the animal’s behavior and health on a regular basis.

Whether you’ll be providing care to a sick, underage, under socialized, or long-term animal, you have the opportunity to make a lasting impact in the life of an animal.

## **FOSTER SAFETY**

### **Household Hazards**

Always remember to rabbit proof the area where the foster will be housed prior to bringing them home. Electrical cords, computer cables, medicine, cosmetics, plants, telephone wires, drapes, anything valuable or irreplaceable, etc. should be removed or secured. Survey the area where foster animals will be housed. Anticipate that as foster animals grow, or are rehabilitated, their capabilities may change (e.g. jumping over pet gate).

### **Your Family's Safety**

Children should remain supervised when interacting with foster animals at all times. In addition to managing behavior on both the child and animal's end, it is a foster provider's responsibility to ensure the safety of all parties.

Should a child or adult be bitten by a foster in your care please contact the Volunteer Services Department immediately. Be certain you scrub the affected area with hot water and soap. You should also seek the consultation of your health care provider as soon as possible. A bite report may need to be completed by the authorities, depending on your community.

### **Your Pet's Safety**

The Anti-Cruelty Society highly recommends that new foster animals be kept apart from owned pets for a period of time once they have entered your care. This is not only to ensure that all animals in your household have a chance to properly acclimate, it is also to reduce the risk of spreading illness.

The majority of common pet diseases are not transferable from one species to the other. Despite this, we still urge you to keep the foster animal segregated from your resident pet(s) for a period of time, if not for the entire foster period. Fosters should always wash their hands between handling a foster animal and a resident pet. As an added line of defense foster providers should ensure that all owned pets are up to date on their yearly vaccines. Note that the Anti-Cruelty Society will not reimburse you for medical attention for your own resident pets.

## **BASIC RABBIT CARE**

Rabbits are incredibly intelligent, loving, and social creatures. With an average lifespan of 7 – 10 years, these incredibly affectionate pets make wonderful companions for people from all walks of life. Though many people may assume that they make good starter pets, rabbits vast intelligence, and intense socialization needs, make them best suited for someone with the time or experience to really invest into their bunny's care. Social and inquisitive, rabbits free roam a home just like cats once they are properly litterbox trained. Unlike most other pets, rabbits are prey animals which means they prefer to be grounded at all times. Rabbits need daily socialization and stimulation from both their caretakers and within their environment. Providing rabbits with appropriate objects to chew, a healthy diet, daily snuggles, and a variety of toys and accessories ensures a rabbits overall mental and physical well-being. Below you will find basic guidelines to ensure their proper care.

## GENERAL RABBIT CARE

**Appetite & Adjustment:** It is not unusual for some rabbits to have a reduced appetite for a day after entering foster care. Remember that the animal is coping with a new home and new people, which can be stressful. For this reason fosters are urged to maintain a calm and quiet environment in the beginning of each animal's stay. Remember to have a designated hiding spot available to your bunny, and allow him or her time to adjust to your lifestyle. If a foster animal develops persistent diarrhea, or does not eat after being in your care for 24 hours or more, please contact us for assistance.

### Exercise and Play

Rabbits love to run, jump, and play and need plenty of exercise to burn calories, stimulate their minds, and maintain their overall emotional health. If they don't have enough physical and mental stimulation, animals tend to get bored, which can lead to destructive behaviors. The amount of exercise and play necessary for your foster depends on their age and personality, but most rabbits require at least 4 hours of cage-free time and interactive play each and every day.

### Bowel Movements & Gastrointestinal Upset

Rabbits are herbivores, eating a diet entirely of grasses and other plants. Because their diet contains so much cellulose, they pass two different kinds of feces to completely break down their food. While other grazers will chew and swallow their feed, then "burp" it back up (as cows chew cud), rabbits will re-ingest their feces on the first pass to get all of the nutrients they need.

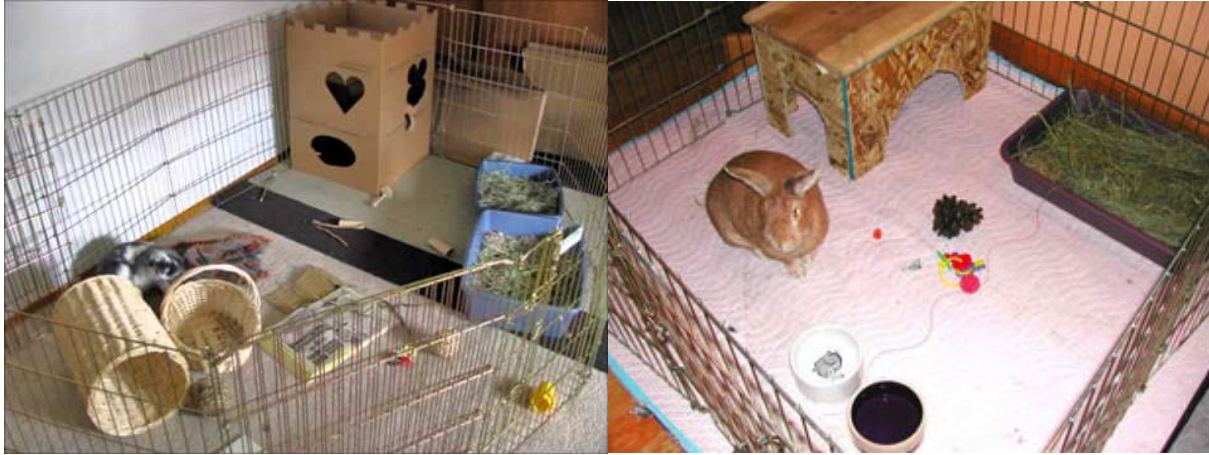
Rabbits have very delicate digestive systems that are prone to become blocked if enough fiber is not being ingested on a daily basis. This is why having unlimited hay and water at a rabbit's disposal is incredibly important. Feeding rabbits inappropriate foods, or certain gas-producing vegetables in high quantity, can also be to blame. Please monitor your foster rabbit's bowel movements. Loose or watery stools may be an indication of stomach upset, while no stools can be a sign of a block. If your rabbit is experiencing either, please contact us immediately. In some cases our veterinary team may recommend a probiotic supplement combined with antibiotics, while in cases of gas or stasis we may have you pick up a bottle of children's over the counter gas-x to relief discomfort.

**Hygiene & Disinfection:** The Anti-Cruelty Society recommends the use of stainless steel food and water bowls. They are the most durable, easy to disinfect and keep free of contaminants. The best way to disinfect objects (toys, bowls, litter boxes, etc.) is with water and vinegar. Due to rabbits' sensitive skin we do not recommend using bleach or other corrosive chemicals to clean accessories or housing spaces.

### Rabbit Housing & Set-Up:

Rabbits require both vertical and horizontal space to provide them with enough leg room to jump, stretch, romp, and run. We recommend cordoning off a small room, or investing in a play pen, in which to house your foster. A hutch can also be used, but only when placed indoors. Rabbits who are confined to a cage need to be provided with out of cage time for at least 4 hours each day. Cages should not have wire bottoms as they may cause harm to a rabbit's feet. Ensure that your foster rabbit does not have access to house plants, cords, books, or any other property that he or she can damage or that can cause the bunny harm. Providing your foster with appropriate chew toys will prevent them from damaging your possessions.

When choosing where to setup your foster's space, consider a room or area that has light traffic, but where the bunny will also be exposed to regular human activity. Each housing space should include one or two litter boxes. Placing a layer of hay over the litter will encourage your foster rabbit to use the box. Rabbits should be provided with fresh water. Some rabbits prefer a bottle, while others prefer a bowl. Offer both until you know your foster rabbit's personal preference. You will also want to provide at least one hiding spot so the rabbit has a private space available to him or her.



*Examples of an ideal foster rabbit habitat*

Bunny proofing your home is part of living with a foster rabbit. It is natural for rabbits to chew on furniture, rugs, drapes, and electrical cords. Most houseplants are toxic. Make sure they are out of the rabbit's reach. Rabbits chew to exercise their minds, not just their teeth. Providing lots of entertaining alternatives for your bun to chew on is the best deterrent for a destructive critter. Preventing rabbits from chewing on electrical cords is of utmost importance, since rabbits can be burned or electrocuted.

### **Care Supplies**

The Anti-Cruelty Society provides all rabbit fosters with basic starter supplies which include a carrier, litter box, and play pen. We may send you home with other items, like toys and blankets, as we have them available. Foster parents will need to provide their rabbits with hay, pellets, water and a dispenser, a brush for weekly grooming, fresh foods, litter, a hiding spot, and toys.

Additional rabbit supplies may include:

- Cardboard Boxes: Can be used for open play, as a hiding spot, or for chewing.
- Untreated Pine: Provides an excellent opportunity for chewing
- Compressed Alfalfa Cubes: Provide enrichment, fiber, and a chewing opportunity
- Wicker Baskets & Balls: For play, napping, and chewing
- Willow & Aspen Branches: For chewing and play
- Toilet Paper Tubes: Can be filled with hay and treats to create a puzzle toy
- Empty Oatmeal Containers: Cut off the bottom and these make for fun play
- Hard Plastic Baby & Cat Toys: For play and tossing
- Phone Book: For shredding and chewing
- Old Blankets: To cover up hardwood or tile floors to give rabbit traction.

## **FOOD & NUTRITION**

Rabbits have a very sensitive digestive system, for this reason, it is incredibly important for foster parents to follow the nutritional guidelines below to ensure each animal's health.

### **Hay**

Hay is one of the most important parts of your foster rabbit's diet as it provides fiber which keeps their digestive tract happy and healthy. Grass hay is rich in Vitamin A and D as well as calcium, protein and other nutrients. Eating hay promotes healthy teeth and gastrointestinal tract and should be available to your rabbit at all times. A hay dispenser can be placed above the rabbit's litterbox to encourage house-training while a

pile should also be placed in the rabbit's pen for leisurely munching. If you are fostering a rabbit over 1 year of age, timothy hay is the standard recommendation. For rabbits under 1 year of age you will need to provide alfalfa variety hay. Both types of hay can be purchased at big box pet stores or can be ordered through Amazon. Ox Bow is the most popular brand amongst rabbit enthusiasts.

### **Pellets**

Rabbit pellets are a form of compressed hay that provide an extra boost of calories and fiber in the daily diet. Since hay and fresh greens make up the greater part of your foster's nutrition, pellets should be given as a supplement, not as the main form of food. Pellet formulas that include corn, seeds, or nuts are not recommended as these items can cause stomach upset or stasis. We recommend purchasing a pellet formula with a minimum of additives and without added sugar.

### **Fresh Foods**

Rabbits should be provided with an abundance of fresh foods daily. The bulk of fresh foods should be made up of leafy greens. Not only are fresh veggies essential on a nutritional level, they also provide enrichment and flavor that results in a more contented rabbit. Feed around 1 cup of greens for 2 pounds of rabbit body weight once a day or divided into multiple daily feedings.

When introducing new foods to any rabbit's diet it is best to go slowly to allow the gastrointestinal tract and all its important microorganisms to adjust. Introduce one new food every three days and keep a watch on the stools. If you note softer stools that persist over a couple of days, then you might want to remove that food from your foster bunny's diet. Keep a list as you go of the foods that your rabbit has successfully eaten; you will then have a handy shopping list when you go to the store.

The following greens should make up the majority (75%) of a rabbit's diet:

- |                    |                    |                        |
|--------------------|--------------------|------------------------|
| - Romaine          | - Arugula          | - Spring Greens        |
| - Cilantro         | - Basil            | - Carrot Tops          |
| - Endive           | - Ecarole          | - Frisee Lettuce       |
| - Kale             | - Mache            | - Red or green lettuce |
| - Turnip greens    | - Dandelion greens | - Mint                 |
| - Watercress       | - Wheatgrass       | - Chicory              |
| - Raspberry leaves | - Cilantro         | - Radicchio            |
| - Bok Choy         | - Fennel           | - Borage leaves        |
| - Dill leaves      | - Yu choy          |                        |

The following fresh vegetables can make up about 15% of a rabbit's diet:

- |  |                 |                    |
|--|-----------------|--------------------|
| - Carrots  | - Bell Peppers  | - Chinese Pea Pods |
| - Broccoli   | - Summer Squash | - Zucchini Squash  |
| - Edible flowers (roses, nasturtiums, pansies, hibiscus) |                 |                    |

The following greens should be fed sparingly as they either have a high vitamin A content, oxalates, or may cause a rabbit's digestive system to become overly gassy, which can lead to stasis.

- |                   |               |                  |
|-------------------|---------------|------------------|
| - Iceberg lettuce | - Spinach     | - Mustard Greens |
| - Parsley         | - Beet greens | - Swiss chard    |
| - Radish tops     |               |                  |

The following foods should **not** be fed to rabbits as they may cause digestive upset and gas, which can be fatal.

- Cabbage
- Beans
- Cauliflower
- Brussel Sprouts
- Grains
- Broccoli
- Potatoes

### **Tasty Treats**

Sweet treats should be just that: a treat! Over-feeding rabbits the foods below, which are high in both sugar content and calories, can lead to malnutrition and digestive upset. Rabbit fosters should avoid feeding dried fruits, yogurt drops, or any processed human foods. Sweet treats can be given cubed, or whole, with the skin. Note that apple seeds contain arsenic so should be removed prior to feeding. Utilize treats for training your bunny to come when called, to encourage litterbox use, or to enter their hutch or playpen. Just like we recommend with dogs and cats, food rewards should be provided as a motivator for polite behavior.

- Apple
- Peach
- Papaya
- Peeled Pineapple
- Star Fruit
- Pitted Cherries
- Pitted Plums
- Mango
- Banana Slices
- Apricot
- Pear
- Kiwi
- Berries
- Cubed Melon
- Nectarine

### **General Handling**

Since rabbits are prey animals by nature they require a slow approach and gentle touch, especially in their first few days in foster care as they get to know you and their environment. When handling a rabbit we encourage that you come down to their level, rather than trying to force them up or to be held. Unlike with dogs or cats, you do not need to let a rabbit sniff your hand before you begin to pet them. Rabbits enjoy being stroke on top of their heads, down the bridge of their nose, and between their ears. As they are more comfortable with you the rabbit may allow you to stroke their back as well. Note that most rabbits do not like having their paws or back sides touched.

### **Lifting**

Rabbits do not like to be lifted off the ground, but if something necessitates the action, note that they should not be lifted by the ears or scruff. Instead, lift the rabbit by placing one hand under the chest of the rabbit and place the other hand beneath the rabbit's rear end, slowly lift and bring the rabbit snug to your body. If the rabbit begins to flail then stop and allow the rabbit to calm down before proceeding again. A rabbit's back is very fragile and they can injure themselves easily if they are allowed to thrash when being picked up. Rabbits have been known to break their own backs when resisting being lifted.

### **Grooming**

Rabbits are fastidious groomers. They insist on being clean and tidy and will lick themselves like cats, and like cats, they can get hairballs if they ingest too much hair. Unlike cats however, rabbits cannot vomit. Rabbits need to be brushed at least weekly. In addition to removing any loose hair, this weekly brushing session helps prepare them for the multiple daily brushings that they must undergo when their heavy shedding begins.

### **Baths**

The vast majority of rabbits, like their ancestors, do not relish getting wet. Even an occasional bath is quite stressful to the average rabbit and is not recommended. We ask fosters **never** to give a sick rabbit a bath. Because seemingly healthy rabbits can have undiagnosed problems, it's best not to subject them to the stress of a bath unless it is advised by Society staff.

## Nails

Rabbit nails can grow to be very long and sharp and will be uncomfortable for the rabbit. If the rabbit has light colored nails they are very easy to trim. You can see the blood inside the nail and you clip just before that point. The dark colored nails are harder to see where they should be clipped but it is still visible. You can schedule to have the nails clipped with the clinic if you aren't comfortable doing them yourself.

## BEHAVIOR & TRAINING

Getting to know your foster rabbit, and his or her unique needs, will help you to provide an enriching foster experience for both you and the bunny, and knowing more about their behavior, communication style, and training needs will empower you to do just that!

### Body Language

Knowing how your foster rabbit is feeling is extremely important if you want to maintain their happiness and health. The following is a basic body language list to help you interpret your rabbits signals.

- **Content:** If a rabbit is relaxed it will be laying stretched out with its front paws in front of it, or it may have all its paws tucked beneath its body. It may also be laying on its side. Its ears may be flat on its back.
- **Happy:** When a rabbit is happy and excited, it will jump into the air and flick its body. This is called a binky. Many rabbits will run around very quickly before binkyng. Sometimes, if a rabbit is feeling lazy, it won't do a proper binky, but will remain on the ground and do a sort of shuddery-flick. Rabbits will click or grind their teeth when content – similar to a purring cat and may also give you a love nibble to show their affinity for you. Rabbits may also “mark” by rubbing their chin, where there scent gland is located, on objects or their caretakers.
- **Fearful:** If a rabbit's ears are flat on its back, its eyes are bulging and its body is tense and hunched up, it is scared. If a rabbit is really terrified, it may be trembling and breathing heavily. Some rabbits may also bite if they are afraid and feel threatened. A thumping rabbit may also be responding out of fear or may be warning you of, what they interpret, as imminent danger.

Remember that rabbits are a prey species. The more predictable their environment and the more securely they are handled, the more relaxed and sociable they become. Some rabbits relinquished to shelters have been traumatized in their former environments. They may have learned to survive by nipping or boxing. These behaviors can usually be eliminated by correct handling and social interaction. If a rabbit is showing you overtly aggressive behaviors, contact our foster team for assistance.

## ENRICHMENT

Rabbits are social and intelligent animals who, just like humans, can grow bored with their surroundings. To ensure your rabbit is stimulated and staying out of trouble, employ a variety of enrichment techniques to keep them happy.

**Digging Box:** A digging box can be provided very simply and cheaply, by putting something like soil or soil mixed with straw inside a box. Start off with just a shallow layer with food 'planted' in the soil. If you use soil from your garden, make sure it doesn't contain anything that could be harmful to the foster rabbit, such as slug pellets.

**Cardboard Box:** Rabbits love "projects" - i.e. objects in their environments that they can move and manipulate. These provide stimulation and exercise. Offer plain brown, corrugated cardboard boxes for chewing and "interior desecration." Plain, non-toxic wooden or hard plastic baby toys can also be



appropriate "toys" for rabbits. Assemble puzzle toys for your foster using toilet paper tubes stuffed with hay and treats, or play hide and seek with your rabbit by hiding snacks under some of their existing toys.

**Paper Sacks:** Some rabbits also like to go right inside large paper sacks - they can be encouraged to dig about in these by putting in shredded paper with vegetables mixed in. Food can be placed inside smaller paper bags that are scrunched up.

**Treat Boxes:** Get 2-3 small boxes from a local craft store. They should be made of wood and be untreated/unpainted. Pick those that have a lid a rabbit could open by flipping, pushing, or pulling. The ones with hinges should be okay, but if there are magnets you will have to remove those. Hide treats inside the boxes and let your rabbit find them! This works even better once the boxes are glued to a base, such as a wooden board.

## TRAINING

Like cats and dogs, rabbits are highly intelligent social creatures who are able to learn quickly and are natural people pleasers. Utilizing positive reinforcement and redirection techniques, foster parents can help train their rabbits up to become model bunny citizens for their future adopters.

### Litterbox Training

Rabbits will naturally choose one or two spots in which to eliminate. You can train a rabbit to use a spot you've designated, though typically it's easier to go with their preferred location. Whether you choose theirs or your own, you will need to provide a litter box (or a few) with low sides and no top. For litter, use recycled paper pellets, recycled pine pellets, or general rabbit bedding. Do not use clay-based or clumping litter as this is harmful to rabbits' respiratory systems. Avoid wood shavings as well. Put a thin layer of litter at the bottom of the litter box- just enough to absorb wetness. There's no need to fill it too high since rabbits don't bury their droppings like cats. Plus, when you clean the litter box, you dump the entire contents out each time. So you will unnecessarily go through a lot of litter if you deeply fill the box each time.

Rabbits like to eat hay and poop at the same time. So to promote good litter box habits, place hay either directly in the box over the litter or place it in a hay box next to the litter box. If you use a hay box, position it so the rabbit must hop into the litter box in order to reach the hay.

It's easiest to develop good litter box habits in rabbits by limiting their space at first. Use a pen to confine your rabbit to one area, even if you intend to give him or her free reign of your home eventually. This allows your foster bunny to get acclimated to the area in the beginning. Once your bunny consistently uses the litter box, you can gradually expand the area. If your rabbit starts "forgetting" to use the litter box, then limit the space again until good habits resume.

Here are a few other tips for those stubborn, "outside-the-box" bunnies:

- If accidents occur, mop up urine with a paper towel and pick up stray poop and place both in the litter box. This helps get the message across that the litter box is the place that they should do their business. Keep in mind that rabbits are generally not 100% perfect with their litter box. Sometimes they leave a few droppings next to the box, or they urinate over the edge of their box. This is normal, so placing a plastic mat under their litter box or putting the litter box on a tile floor makes it easier to clean up these little mistakes.
- Be patient and persistent. Litter training takes time, especially if your rabbit has learned bad habits. It takes a while to retrain them. If you can see they're about to go outside their litter box (they may lift

their tail or sometimes they sort of shimmy down in a seated position right before they go), try to pick them up and put them in the litter box or corral them in. This is oftentimes easier said than done of course.

- If your foster bunny is insistent on going in one corner of the room, sometimes it's easier to give in to their stubbornness, and place a litter box in that corner. Sometimes when rabbits consistently choose another place to go, they are trying to tell you that that's where they want to go.

Litter training your pet rabbit takes patience and persistence. If you are running into consistent problems with house soiling, please contact the foster services team for assistance.

### **Chewing and Digging**

If your foster rabbit is chewing or digging inappropriate items you will need to intervene with some proactive training. Observe your foster rabbit to see what items draw his or her attention. If possible, provide something with a similar (or better) taste and texture to what is being chewed. For example, a piece of untreated, unfinished baseboard (screwed into something so it doesn't move) instead of the real baseboard; or a piece of scrap carpet instead of the real carpet (as long as the rabbit isn't ingesting the pieces he pulls out); or a piece of apple branch instead of chair legs.

The same thing applies to digging. If the rabbit loves to dig in the carpet, build a small "corner" or "tunnel" with carpeting on the bottom (frequently replaced) and give this to him to distract him. Or make a digging box by blocking the end-opening of a covered litter box and cutting a hole in the side. The rabbit will go in, turn so her body runs the length of the box (providing she is large enough that her body doesn't fit cross-wise). The digging material will be flung against the sealed end of the litter box and remain contained. Use something totally dust-free and safe in the digging box (see the litter faq). Rabbits, being the incredibly intelligent little creatures that they are, quickly learn.

## **RABBIT HEALTH**

The health of your foster rabbit will be determined prior to them being placed in your care. All foster animals who are actively ill will be identified as such prior to placement. In some cases, however, it should be noted that a medical condition may surface after they have been in your home. Below is general information on the most common health issues that may arise.

### **Symptoms of Illness**

- If your bunny skips a meal, try to give him one of his favorite treats to see if she'll eat it. If your foster rabbit doesn't eat for at least 24 hours contact our clinic or foster team to schedule a check-up.
- Sneezing, weepy eyes or nose, and lethargic behavior are other signs of ill health.
- If your fosters poop starts decreasing in size or loses its shape, contact the clinic.

Please contact The Anti-Cruelty Society immediately if any of the following symptoms are present:

- Diarrhea
- No defecation or urination
- Sudden loss of appetite
- Head tilt
- Incontinence (urine-soaked rear legs)
- Abscesses, lumps or swellings anywhere
- Any sudden behavior change

## **COMMON HEALTH CONDITIONS**

### **Overgrown Teeth**

Like humans, rabbits' nails grow constantly and need a trim about every six weeks. Unlike humans, rabbits' teeth grow constantly. This makes it imperative that your foster rabbit gets unlimited timothy hay and wooden toys to chew on. If your rabbit's teeth stop grinding normally, he or she may find eating painful and starve. Be sure to monitor your rabbit's eating habits. Even 12 hours without food can be deadly. If you suspect that your foster rabbit's teeth are overgrown, contact the Society clinic to schedule a tooth trimming appointment.

### **Gastrointestinal Stasis**

When GI stasis occurs a rabbit's digestive system is blocked and shuts down. The first symptom that becomes apparent is a rabbit's such loss of appetite or a lack of stool production. GI stasis can be fatal. GI stasis can be prevented by providing your foster rabbits with daily fiber in the form of hay, weekly grooming, and plenty of exercise.

Rabbits normally eat frequently throughout the day. If your rabbit does not eat for 4-6 hours – if there is ANY change in your rabbit's normal eating habits – contact s immediately. Always check bunny droppings when cleaning the cage or litter box. Droppings are usually of uniform size and consistent in shape. If droppings suddenly get smaller, misshapen, or strung together with thick strands of hair (some hair is normal, it means it is getting through), or if there are no droppings at all – contact the clinic immediately.

### **Coccidia**

Coccidia is an internal protozoan parasite which generally infects the small intestine. Coccidia is generally contracted by outside rabbits from damp dirt or grass, where bacteria and parasites tend to hide and can be prevented by bring bunnies inside to live. Symptoms can include loss of appetite, diarrhea, bloating, and loss of hairs. Coccidia spreads quickly through oral or anal contact, so infected rabbits must be quarantined from other animals until the infection has been treated and confirmed as having passed.

### **Poopy Butt**

Poopy butt is, just as it sounds, a condition where a bunny has fecal matter stuck to his behind. Usually the culprit is poor diet. Mobility issues may also cause your foster rabbit to suffer from poopy butt. Older rabbits, obese rabbits, or those with arthritis, may have a difficult time reaching their bottoms, preventing them from consuming their cecotropes. Another cause for poopy butt is molar spurs. Sometimes rabbits' teeth wear down unevenly, resulting in sharp edges that poke into their cheeks. The pain and stress caused by the molar spurs will upset their digestive health. To treat this, a rabbit-savvy vet will need to file the sharp edges down.

If your foster rabbit has a messy behind, you'll need to clean the area as soon as possible. A soiled bottom could invite fly strike, a very unpleasant and potentially deadly situation in which flies lay their eggs on your foster bunny, and the hatched larvae feast on your bunny's flesh.

Baths can be very traumatic for bunnies, so if possible just spot clean the area using a wet paper towel. However, if the feces have hardened and the area is very messy, the next course of action is a shallow bath. Fill a sink with a few inches of warm water (just enough so that the soiled area will be submerged) and mix in a dollop of pet shampoo (NOT human shampoo). Place your bunny in the bath and wash the soiled area until clean. Change out the water as necessary. Be careful when washing the area as the skin is very sensitive! Once your bunny is clean, rinse the soapy areas with warm water and then gently towel dry your

bunny. Make sure your rabbit is not exposed to cold temperatures before fully dry.

If a change to a more fibrous diet does not stop the poopy butt from occurring contact our foster team to schedule a check-up for your foster.

### **Conjunctivitis**

Conjunctivitis in rabbits can be caused by a bacterial infection and if treated with the right type of antibiotics will clear up pretty quickly. The disease manifests itself by the conjunctival membranes which are found around the eye becoming very red and swollen and a pus may cause crusting of the eyes. If the eyes are closed, this is a bad sign because it means pus is building up behind the eyelids causing your foster rabbit a lot of pain. The sooner the treatment is started the better. You can gently clean the discharge with a lint-free damp and warm cloth but then you need to get your rabbit in for a clinic exam immediately. A Society veterinarian will be able to examine your foster rabbit and recommend a course of antibiotic eye drops as well as some painkillers and oral antibiotics. It is important for your rabbit to complete the course of antibiotics to beat off the eye infection.

### **Upper Respiratory Infections**

Infection with the *Pasteurella multocida* bacterium can result in a severe respiratory illness, generally characterized by nose infections, sinusitis, ear infections, conjunctivitis, pneumonia, and generalized infection of the blood, among other things. This condition is often referred to as the “snuffles” because of the snuffling breathing sound affected rabbits make. It may also cause abscesses in the subcutaneous (beneath the top layer of skin) tissues, bone, joints, or internal organs in rabbits. The *pasteurella* bacteria usually co-exist in the rabbit’s body with other, more common bacteria that cause nasal infections.

Not all infected rabbits become severely ill. The outcome of an infection depends on the potential strength of the bacteria and the host’s own immune defenses. More potent strains may produce pleuritic infection (an infection of the membranes surrounding the lungs), pneumonia, and thinning bones. In some cases the bacteria can enter the bloodstream, leading to a condition of bacteremia. An infection of the blood fluid may cause fever, depression, and shock.

Symptoms may be mild, moderate, or severe, but typically consist of sneezing and nasal discharge. If these symptoms are present in your foster rabbit, please contact the foster team to schedule an appointment with a Society veterinarian.

## THANK YOU

Over the years, a tremendous amount of success and progress has been achieved in the care provided to animals and educating the community. However, more work needs to be done. Together with the help of foster volunteers like yourself, who selflessly contribute hundreds of hours annually, the companion animals of Chicago have a voice and advocates to provide them with the love, care, and attention they all need and deserve.

We thank you again for your decision to become a foster volunteer with us and for choosing to help the animals in our care. Your efforts make a significant difference in The Anti-Cruelty Society's work and our mission to find loving homes for shelter pets.

We hope you find your foster volunteer experience at The Anti-Cruelty Society enjoyable and rewarding. If you have any questions or concerns at any time, please contact the Volunteer Services Department.



*Thank you again! We look forward to working with you!*

## IMPORTANT CONTACTS LIST

### **MAIN TELEPHONE NUMBER**

(312)644-8338

### **VETERINARY CLINIC**

#### **Main Switchboard**

Ext. 350 or 351

If you need to reach a member of the clinic team beyond switchboard hours, please call our operator at (312)644-8338 ext. 381 and identify yourself as a foster parent in need of medical assistance. Note that there are no staff in the building between 8 p.m. – 8 a.m.

### **VOLUNTEER SERVICES DEPARTMENT**

#### **Lydia Krupinski**

Director of Community Programs

Rabbit Foster Lead

[krupinski@anticruelty.org](mailto:krupinski@anticruelty.org)

ext. 330

#### **Eric Tostado**

Coordinator of Volunteer Services

Foster Program Lead

[sbruno@anticruelty.org](mailto:sbruno@anticruelty.org)

ext. 313

#### **Tara Laffey**

Humane Education Specialist

Neo-Nate Foster Lead

[tlaffey@anticruelty.org](mailto:tlaffey@anticruelty.org)

ext. 341

### **ANIMAL BEHAVIOR & INTAKE**

Leave a detailed message on the voice mail. Most behavior calls are returned the following afternoon. Please identify yourself as a foster parent when leaving a voicemail. Your calls will be made a priority.

#### **Tracy Hamilton**

[thamilton@anticruelty.org](mailto:thamilton@anticruelty.org)

ext. 343

#### **Melissa Klett**

[mklett@anticruelty.org](mailto:mklett@anticruelty.org)

ext. 315

#### **Avril Brown**

[abrown@anticruelty.org](mailto:abrown@anticruelty.org)

#### **Lillian Butterfield**

[lbutterfield@anticruelty.org](mailto:lbutterfield@anticruelty.org)



## RABBIT PERSONALITY PROFILE

Please complete this questionnaire in advance and bring it in with your foster on the day of their return to the shelter. The Receiving Team will attach this form to their kennel card, which will make it available to both personnel and potential adopters. The more detailed information you provide, the better job we can do of matching your foster animal to the appropriate adoptive home. Thank you in advance!

Rabbit's Name \_\_\_\_\_ Animal ID # \_\_\_\_\_ Return Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Length of Time in Foster: \_\_\_\_\_ Are they returning early? No\_\_ Yes\_\_

Reason Fostered? Age/weight \_\_ Medical\_\_ Socialization\_\_ Injury\_\_ Shelter Vacation\_\_

## FOSTER BEHAVIOR INFORMATION

Describe the ideal home for your foster animal:

Cute things your foster does that could be endearing to a future adopter:

What kinds of routines and activities does your foster like most?

How social is your foster when meeting new people? Describe their behavior.

What are her/his favorite games and toys?

Please list anything s/he may be afraid of (e.g. thunder, vacuum, etc.)?

How does s/he react when afraid (hides, growls, etc.)?

Did s/he stay with other animals? No\_\_ Yes \_\_

If yes, what kind? Dogs\_\_ Cats\_\_ Rabbits\_\_ Birds\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

How did s/he get along with them?

Did s/he live with children? No\_\_ Yes\_\_ Ages: \_\_\_\_\_

If yes, how did s/he get along with them?

When was the rabbit active? Early\_\_Daytime\_\_Late\_\_Overnight\_\_All day\_\_Never\_\_

Please note any problems you may have experienced with this foster rabbit:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## FOSTER CARE INFORMATION

Food Preferred \_\_\_\_\_ Amount \_\_\_\_\_ How often? \_\_\_\_\_

Where did the cat stay during the foster period? \_\_\_\_\_

Single-level House\_\_ Multi-level House \_\_ Apartment/Condo\_\_

What was the rabbit's housing set-up? \_\_\_\_\_

What type of litter was used (paper pellets, pine, etc.)? \_\_\_\_\_

Would you describe this rabbit as litterbox trained? No\_\_ Yes\_\_

Did the foster ever not use the litter pan? No\_\_ Yes\_\_

If yes, please describe the circumstances (where did s/he go, urine, stool, how often):

\_\_\_\_\_

Additional Notes: