



Rabbits as Therapy Pets

A friendly, confident rabbit can be a great therapy pet as they are cute and non-threatening. Many rabbits are small enough to be a good "lap size" therapy pet.

A therapy rabbit should be well socialized, have a calm demeanor, enjoy being petted, and love being around people. A therapy rabbit is a healthy rabbit of any size, breed, color, shape, sex, or age (but needs to be at least one year old). The rabbit must be comfortable going to new places and riding in a car. He or she should be calm while being held and petted (without getting restless and suddenly trying to jump). Additionally, a therapy rabbit should have good litter box habits. This includes not eliminating while being held or while on a blanket or towel, for an hour or longer. Like a good therapy cat, a therapy rabbit should not be stressed by being around other therapy pets.

As with our dog therapy members, rabbits must be on a 4-foot leash at all times when visiting. You may use a harness or a collar to attach the leash to your rabbit. You may carry your rabbit. Some handlers use a pet stroller to carry and contain their therapy rabbit while on a visit, in addition to the harness or collar.

Your rabbit should be clean before each visit. Toenails should be clipped as short as is safe. Brush and comb your rabbit to remove as much loose fur as possible. This is a good time to double-check your rabbit's body, especially eyes, ears, and rear end. Putting a towel down first, when visiting, can help protect against accidentally scratching someone and minimize the fur left behind.

Your supervised visits (after successfully completing the Love on a Leash® Control Evaluation for Cats or Rabbits) give you the opportunity to discover whether or not your rabbit is appropriate for pet therapy work. Does your rabbit seem to enjoy these visits? A stressed-out rabbit is not a good therapy pet and should not be forced to continue. Signs of stress in a rabbit can include, but are not limited to: ears laid back tightly, body tense with tail up, pulling away, trying to hide, or even something as subtle as eyes widening. The House Rabbit Society (HRS), www.houserabbit.org, is an international nonprofit rescue and education group that has lots of information about the health, care, and behavior of rabbits.

If you are certain your rabbit is enjoying this added attention (once they get used to what is expected at each visit), then welcome to the rewarding world of pet therapy!