



## CATS AND RABBITS – INTRODUCTION AND COEXISTENCE

Pet cats and pet rabbits can co-exist in the home if properly introduced. However, it is important to always remember that cats are predators and rabbits are prey. If your cat exhibits predatory behavior, introducing a rabbit will put the rabbit in danger. Cats need space to run and play and so does a rabbit- but a running/hopping rabbit can trigger a cat's prey drive. The best option is to set up visual barriers between the rabbit and cat, so that the cat can feel more relaxed and the rabbit feels a greater sense of safety.

However, it's important to note that rabbits are far more territorial than cats, are capable of defending themselves, and could possibly cause injury to a cat. Additionally, being in the presence of one another may also be very stressful, and stress over time will cause health problems. If your rabbit is free roaming all day and night (though it should have a "home base" for safety, stress reduction and/or rest), there should be someone home all day to supervise their interactions. The best living situation for cats and rabbits is for the rabbit to be in an indoor hutch or cage most of the day, in between being out of the cage for exercise sessions throughout the day. When the rabbit has its exercise time in a round pen or separate room, the cat should not have access to those areas.

Try to set both animals up for success by minimizing the potential for the rabbit to trigger the cat's prey/chase/stalking behavior. Perhaps introduction during a period of time during which the cat is sleepy or full from eating is best to introduce a rabbit, as the cat will be less likely to want to chase the rabbit. By the same token, the introduction space should not be one that the rabbit will feel the need to defend or be territorial.

Though the physical and social dynamics and behavior of cat and/or rabbit may affect introductions and coexistence in a home, the basic steps of introduction are largely the same.

### Introduction Steps:

1. **Find a Neutral Space:** Choose a neutral, well lit, safe space in your home that is not frequently used by the rabbit, as they are more territorial than cats. The space should be clear of clutter and any strong scent of either animal.
2. **Secure the Rabbit in a Safe Enclosure:** With the rabbit safe and secure in either a large rabbit crate/cage that has a hiding place in it or an x-pen with a crate in which the rabbit can hide, allow the rabbit and cat to have only visual access to one another at first. If there is no startle or flight reaction from the rabbit or chase/stalk behavior initiated in the cat, you can move the cat and crate/pen closer to one another, allowing them to sniff each other through the protective barrier(s). Be prepared to remove the cat from the area should a predatory situation arise.
  - As long as things are going well, allow the cat and rabbit to interact in this manner for at least one hour, making adjustments and/or taking breaks as needed. Make sure to create positive associations for BOTH animals and reduce or eliminate any negative associations (chase/stalk behavior frightening the rabbit and/or the rabbit's territorial behavior threatening the cat).
  - After several days of a few 1 hour sessions like this, and feeling confident that no harm can come to either animal, move to the next phase of introduction... barrier-free introduction. Scrutinizing supervision is mandatory at this point, and the rabbit should have a place to escape into hiding from the cat, should the cat decide to chase and or attack the rabbit. Under no circumstances should the two animals be FORCED to interact or tolerate one another.

As with most animal to animal introductions, patience, consistency and adjustment might be needed at any stage of the introduction period.