



R A B B I T S : From the Animal's Point of View (5)

# Rabbit Care and Responsibility



## Subject Overview and Background Information

There is a lot to know about raising and caring for rabbits. Having a rabbit is a big responsibility and one needs to understand its behavior, housing requirements, nutritional needs, and potential health care issues in order to prevent injury or disease. Knowledge of these essential facts is the foundation of becoming a successful rabbit caretaker. By applying this knowledge carefully and thoughtfully, a caretaker can properly maintain the health and well-being of a rabbit and ensure it a high quality of life.

### • Concepts and Vocabulary

Proper animal care, quality of life, responsibility.

### • Life Skills

Critical thinking, decision making, disease prevention, problem solving, sharing

### • Subject Links

Science, Language Arts

### • Overview of Activity

This activity, entitled *Rabbit Responsibility*, provides different scenarios that involve issues relating to the care and raising of a rabbit. Youth will need to use the knowledge they gained from the previous rabbit units as they read scenarios and answer questions concerning the proper care of rabbits. Youth will discuss, reflect, and suggest alternative solutions for each scenario.

**MARTIN H. SMITH**, Cooperative Extension Youth Curriculum Development Specialist, University of California, Davis;  
**CHERYL L. MEEHAN**, Staff Research Associate, UC Davis;  
**JUSTINE M. MA**, Program Representative, UC Davis; **NAO HISAKAWA**, Student Assistant, Veterinary Medicine Extension, UC Davis; **H. STEVE DASHER**, 4-H Youth Development Advisor, UC Cooperative Extension, San Diego County; **JOE D. CAMARILLO**, 4-H Youth Development Advisor, UCCE, Madera County; **JENNIFER TECHANUN**, Student Assistant, Veterinary Medicine Extension, UC Davis; and **UC Davis Undergraduate Curriculum Development Teams**.

## ACTIVITY 1



# Rabbit Responsibility

### Background Information

A tremendous amount of **responsibility** comes with owning an animal. Animals need us to provide for their needs, including a safe and sanitary home, healthy and nutritious food, and proper veterinary care. When we make the commitment to **care** for one or more animals, these responsibilities become part of our everyday obligations.

#### • Time Required

45 to 60 minutes

#### • Concepts and Vocabulary

- **Care.** To provide for the needs of someone or something.
- **Responsibility.** Being accountable for one's actions or behaviors.

#### • Life Skills

Sharing, critical thinking, problem solving, decision making, disease prevention

#### • Subject Links

Science, Language Arts

#### • State Content Standards

##### Science

- Third Grade:
  - » *Investigation and Experimentation – 5e*
- Sixth Grade:
  - » *Investigation and Experimentation – 7d*

##### Language Arts

- Third Grade:
  - » *Reading Comprehension – 2.2, 2.6*

- Fourth Grade:
  - » *Listening and Speaking Strategies – 1.7, 1.8*
- Fifth Grade:
  - » *Reading Comprehension – 2.4*
  - » *Listening and Speaking Strategies – 1.5*
- Sixth Grade:
  - » *Listening and Speaking Strategies – 1.5*
  - » *Speaking Applications – 2.5a, 2.5b*

#### • Suggested Grouping

Pairs or small groups.

#### • Materials Needed

(\* = Materials provided in curriculum)

- \* *Rabbit Responsibility Stories* (4 total)
- Flip chart paper
- Writing implements

#### • Getting Ready

- Divide the youth into as many as four small groups.
- Make sure there is enough flip chart paper and enough writing implements to supply each group.
- Make enough copies of the *Rabbit Responsibility Stories* to give each group a different story.

### Opening Questions

Have the youth work in pairs or small groups. Pose and discuss the following questions:

1. **What does being a “responsible animal owner” mean to you?** Ask the youth to share their ideas verbally or write their thoughts and ideas on the paper provided.
2. **What types of things do you think a responsible owner should do for his or her**

**animal?** Ask the youth to share their ideas verbally or write their thoughts and ideas on the paper provided.

3. **What types of needs do you think rabbits have, and how do you think an owner can best address these needs?** Ask the youth to share their ideas verbally or write their thoughts and ideas on the paper provided.
4. **Describe some situations where you think it might be hard for an owner to keep up with rabbit care responsibilities. What might be the consequences of this?** Ask the youth to share their ideas verbally or write their thoughts and ideas on the paper provided.

## Procedure (Experiencing)

Inform the youth that they are going to review stories about youth who are in situations where they have to make decisions about how they are going to care for their rabbits.

Give each group of youth one of the stories that follow. Encourage each group to discuss their answers to the follow-up questions together and record their ideas on paper. Once the individual groups have discussed their stories, they will present their ideas to the combined groups.

## Sharing, Processing, and Generalizing

After the activity, talk with the youth about their general thoughts, observations, and questions. Follow the lines of thinking developed through the general thoughts, observations, and questions raised by the youth; if necessary, use more targeted questions as prompts to get to particular points. Specific questions might include

1. **Can you think of an example of a situation where you have had to make a difficult decision about caring for your rabbit?** Ask the youth to share their ideas verbally or write their thoughts and ideas on the paper provided.
2. **What are some ways that youth can learn to make the most responsible decisions about caring for their rabbits?** Ask the youth to share

their ideas verbally or write their thoughts and ideas on the paper provided.

3. **Have you ever known someone who was not a responsible animal owner? What caused you to be concerned about the way that they cared for their animal? What, if anything, did you do in that situation?** Ask the youth to share their ideas verbally or write their thoughts and ideas on the paper provided.

## Concept and Term Introduction

At this point, volunteers need to ensure that the concepts of **care** and **responsibility** have been introduced or discovered by the youth. (**Note:** The goal is to have the youth develop concepts through their exploration and define terms using their own words.)

## Concept Application

- If youth have project animals or pets, have them review how they take care of their animals. Is the care they are providing sufficient for the needs of their animals? If not, what do they need to change in order to provide the animals with sufficient and appropriate care?
- If youth do not have a project animal or pets, have them observe a friend's animal and review its condition and care. *Make sure the youth ask permission from the owner before they observe the animal.* Would they deem the care to be sufficient for the needs of the animal? If not, what changes need to be made to provide sufficient care?

## References

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## Rabbit Responsibility Stories

### WHAT SHOULD CONNOR DO?

A 10-year-old boy named Connor adopted a rabbit that is 3 months old. He named his rabbit Bobo. Connor's parents and Connor decided that Bobo is entirely Connor's responsibility, and he must pay for Bobo's expenses with his allowance. Connor accepts this responsibility and is very excited about his new friend. Because his knowledge of rabbits is very limited, he looks up a local rabbit group that he can join to communicate with others about the animal. The group consists of children from ages 8 to 16, and has an online forum where they can post questions and answers about rabbits. Once every two weeks, the group holds a meeting for its members where they can ask questions in person or bring in their rabbits to show a volunteer leader. The overseer of the rabbit group is the parent of a child who has a rabbit of her own.

Connor houses Bobo in a wire cage with a towel on half of the flooring. He researched the proper diet for a rabbit and feeds Bobo a balanced diet. He cleans Bobo's cage regularly and constantly checks to make sure Bobo has plenty of clean water. One day, he decides to let Bobo explore his room. While Bobo is out of his cage and freely wandering around his room, Connor sits at his desk and works on his homework. After one hour, Connor finds Bobo and places him back in the cage.

The next day, Connor notices that Bobo is behaving differently than normal. He is not constantly eating at his food bowl the way he usually does and he is unusually quiet. Connor is worried and posts a question on the online forum, stating how he let Bobo roam freely in his room and what symptoms he is now observing. Connor continues to observe Bobo. The abnormal behaviors do not change or go away. In fact, Bobo seems to be getting more sedentary and losing energy. If he takes Bobo to the vet, he knows it will cost him more than a month's allowance. Connor checks the forum but nobody has replied. He searches online at other websites but they only suggest various causes of abnormal behavior, so he cannot know for sure what is causing Bobo to behave this way. Connor is afraid that if his parents find out that something might be wrong with Bobo that they will not allow him to keep it any longer. He calls the volunteer leader from his rabbit group, but she is out of town and will not be back until tomorrow. Connor is not sure what to do and needs help making his decision.

### Questions for Discussion

1. What, if anything, do you think is wrong with Bobo?
2. What do you think could have caused the problem?
3. Is Connor meeting his responsibilities as a rabbit owner? Explain.
4. Who could Connor talk to for help with this decision?
5. If you were in Connor's situation, what would you do and why?
6. What could Connor have done to avoid this situation?



## WHAT SHOULD KELLY DO?

Kelly has been raising rabbits for the past 3 years. She has several breeding pairs that she houses in a large hutch in her back yard. The rabbits have an indoor area with nesting materials and an outdoor area where they can play, dig, and get fresh air and exercise. Kelly's rabbits get fresh hay and a variety of nutritious vegetables every day. They also get fruit or other small treats on occasion. Kelly provides her rabbits with toys to chew on and play with and cleans their hutch every afternoon as soon as she gets home from school. Every year Kelly's veterinarian visits her rabbits to give them a check up and update their vaccinations. Kelly allows her pairs to breed and raises one litter each year. When the kits are 6 to 8 weeks old and ready to be weaned from their mother, she sells them to earn money. Kelly usually sells her rabbits to people she knows through her local rabbit club or other activities in which she is involved. People like buying rabbits from Kelly because they are always very healthy and tame.

This year, Kelly is planning to sell her kits to raise enough money for a special gift for her mother's birthday. Kelly has been planning to buy her mother a necklace and if she is able to sell all of her kits she will have just enough money. A family from a town 2 hours away has contacted Kelly about buying her bunnies. She does not know this family, but they heard about Kelly's rabbits from a friend of a friend and they are interested in buying 10 kits.

When Kelly's kits are 3 weeks old, the family calls again and tells Kelly that they will be making the trip to her town next weekend and would like to pick up the kits then. Kelly explains that she usually waits to wean the kits from the mother rabbit until they are 6 weeks old and they will only be 4 weeks old by next weekend. The family explains that this is the only time that they can make the long trip to Kelly's town, so if she wants to sell them the rabbits it will have to be next weekend. Kelly is not sure what to do, but she tells the family that she will contact her veterinarian to see what she recommends.

Kelly's veterinarian says that it can be stressful for the kits to be separated from the mother at only 4 weeks of age. However, if they are given Kitten Milk Replacer two times a day until they are 6 weeks old, they can survive and be healthy without their mother.

Kelly also decides to talk about her situation with a friend from her rabbit club. While they discuss the baby rabbits, Kelly mentions the name of the family and her friend suddenly becomes very concerned. Kelly's friend says that she heard about this family before and that they are known as rabbit hoarders. Kelly's friend says that she heard this family keeps many rabbits on their property in dirty, cramped cages, without proper nutrition or veterinary care.

Now Kelly is confused. She has spoken to this family on the phone several times and they seem like very nice and caring people. She usually likes to visit the homes of the families who buy her rabbits, but since these people live so far away she doesn't have the option to do that this time.

Kelly thinks about her situation. She really wants to do a nice thing for her mom by buying the necklace and if she doesn't sell the rabbits to the family from far away, she probably won't be able to raise enough money in time for her mom's birthday. However, she isn't sure about removing the kits from their mother at 4 weeks of age, and what if the story her friend told her about this family taking poor care of their rabbits is true?? Kelly needs help making her decision, but she can't talk to her mom because that would ruin the surprise.

### Questions for Discussion

1. What information do you think Kelly should consider when making her decision?
2. Who could Kelly talk to for help with this decision?
3. If you were in Kelly's situation, what would you do and why?
4. If you were to sell one of your rabbits to a new owner, what type of questions would you ask the buyer?
5. If you were to sell one of your rabbits to a new owner, what type of information should you provide to the buyer to make sure that the rabbit receives proper care?

## WHAT SHOULD HOLLY DO?

A 9-year-old named Holly joins a local animal club and buys Violet, a 7-week-old Californian meat rabbit to show. There is a project meeting every week where the youth gather together and give a brief report to their volunteer leader. The volunteer leader also makes a quick visit to each youth's home every month, where he looks at the animal and talks to the youth to make sure the animal is being properly fed. Holly houses Violet in a wire cage with a soft towel on the flooring.

One day, Holly visits her friend who also has a pet rabbit named Rose. Her friend tells Holly that Rose has a dry spot on her coat that looks a little crusty, which are symptoms of ringworm. Holly holds Rose to examine the spot, and upon returning home, picks up Violet to make sure she has no spots. A month passes, and the club volunteer comes for her visit. Holly takes Violet out of its cage and shows the volunteer. Violet is displaying symptoms of ringworm, but the spots are not in areas that are highly visible, and neither the volunteer leader nor Holly examines Violet thoroughly enough to notice them.

A week later, Holly's friend comes over to visit Violet. Holly picks up Violet and her friend is so excited she squeals with delight, which frightens Violet. Violet starts to struggle in Holly's arms but she holds onto Violet tighter. After several seconds, Holly's hand slips, and she drops Violet on the floor. Violet does not hop away like she normally does, but remains still where she fell.

A week passes, and Holly realizes that she has itchy spots on her elbow that have the appearance of a reddish ring (symptoms of ringworm on humans). Also, she realizes that Violet's movements have not been normal; she has not been hopping. In fact, she has barely been moving. Violet's feed intake has been close to normal so Holly decides to observe her longer. After two weeks, Violet begins to hop again but with a limp. Holly decides to consult a veterinarian. When Holly takes Violet to a veterinarian, she finds out that Violet has a fractured leg bone and ringworm. Unfortunately, because Holly has waited so long for help, Violet's fracture has begun to fuse together. The veterinarian tells her that he could either break the bone again and correctly fix it, or let the fracture continue to heal the way it is. Violet will never hop without a limp, but is no longer in pain.

When Holly goes home, she remembers there is a pre-qualifying rabbit showing during the weekly meeting this week. The veterinarian has told her that ringworm is contagious to other rabbits and humans, and that stressful situations for Violet should be minimized while her leg is healing. If Holly does not participate in this pre-show, she cannot exhibit Violet at the show.

### Questions for Discussion

1. What should Holly do and why?
2. Is Holly meeting her responsibilities as a rabbit owner? Explain.
3. What could Holly have done earlier that would have prevented these problems?
4. What could the volunteer leader have done differently to better guide the youth?



## WHAT SHOULD SHANTAL DO?

A 9-year-old named Shantal just receives a rabbit for her birthday. She decides to name it Bugs. Her parents think that giving her a rabbit will not only provide companionship but also teach her about responsibility. If she can prove in one month that she can take care of Bugs, then she can keep him. She is in charge of feeding, cleaning, and playing with Bugs.

Shantal loves Bugs very much. She places the cage on the windowsill next to her bed so she can be near it. She takes great care in making sure Bugs always has enough food and water. She feeds Bugs lots of greens and carrots. She also loves sharing food with Bugs and always gives a little bit of what she eats to Bugs. This includes peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, cookies, fruits etc. She always makes sure the cage is clean and that Bugs gets enough exercise each day.

Her family plans a vacation and cannot take Bugs along, so Shantal asks her neighbor if she can take care of Bugs. The neighbor doesn't know anything about taking care of rabbits. Shantal tells her that it is easy and all she has to do is give Bugs food and water every day. The neighbor keeps Bugs on the backyard porch. While on vacation, there is an extended heat wave back at home. Bugs does not eat and pants excessively. Bugs also starts to grind his teeth and is very hesitant to eat any food the neighbor gives her. She also doesn't move for most of the time. The neighbor observes all of this but doesn't do anything because she thinks it is probably normal behavior.

When Shantal gets home, she notices Bugs acting strangely. She asks her neighbor what has happened but the neighbor says everything was fine. Concerned, Shantal then asks a family friend who knows a lot about rabbits to come over and take a look at Bugs. The family friend notices Bugs's eyes are unusually watery, with a lot of nasal discharge, and a lot of drooling. He also notices that Bugs's teeth are very long.

### Questions for Discussion

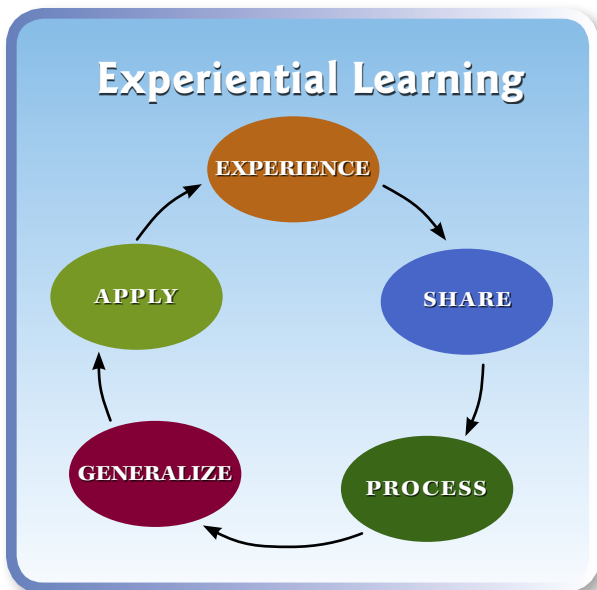
1. What, if anything, do you think is wrong with Bugs?
2. What do you think could have caused these problems?
3. What should Shantal do now and why?
4. Did Shantal meet her responsibilities as a rabbit owner? Explain.
5. What could Shantal have done earlier to prevent these problems?



## APPENDIX

The activities in this curriculum were designed around inquiry and experiential learning. Inquiry is a learner-centered approach in which individuals are problem solvers investigating questions through active engagement, observing and manipulating objects and phenomena, and acquiring or discovering knowledge. Experiential learning (EL) is a foundational educational strategy used in 4-H. In it, the learner has an experience phase of engagement in an activity, a reflection phase in which observations and reactions are shared and discussed, and an application phase in which new knowledge and skills are applied to a real-life setting. In 4-H, an EL model that uses a five-step learning cycle is most commonly used. These five steps—Experiencing, Sharing, Processing, Generalizing, and Application—are part of a recurring process that helps build learner understanding over time.

For more information on inquiry, EL, and the five-step learning cycle, please visit the University of California Science, Technology, and Environmental Literacy Workgroup's Experiential Learning Web site, <http://www.experientiallearning.ucdavis.edu/>.



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Communication Services  
6701 San Pablo Avenue, 2nd Floor  
Oakland, California 94608-1239  
Telephone: 1-800-994-8849  
510-642-2431  
FAX 510-643-5470  
E-mail: [danrcs@ucdavis.edu](mailto:danrcs@ucdavis.edu)

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