

Handling Your Pet Rat

All rats are different and grow comfortable with you at their own pace. There's no perfect technique for building trust with them; however, there's usually a variation of techniques you can use to get your rats comfortable with you if one technique doesn't work. Trust training is a necessary process since they're sociable creatures and will come to love and adore your company in time, so don't give up on them.

How To Trust Train Your Rats

Here are three different techniques that can help you gain the trust of your pet rat. Keep in mind that buying a few extra treats or accessories will be a good investment, not just for trust training, but for your rat's overall enrichment. Trust training rats effectively is as simple as good planning. Be sure to gather all materials you may need before you begin.

The Scent Technique

This technique is one that may work well for a more nervous rat. The idea is to simply introduce your scent before introducing yourself. Nervous rats can find even your presence as imposing and scary, so it's a good idea to gently introduce them to you.

Step 1: Introduce Your Scent. As with all of the previously outlined techniques, when you get your new rat, it's really important to give them the time to settle in and get used to their new habitat and surroundings. Allow them a minimum of two days before beginning. Once your rats have had at least a day to settle, you can begin to introduce your scent. We recommend using a tissue or something similar. In order to scent the tissue, you'll want to wear it on your person for a few hours. Once you have done this, put the tissue into their habitat. Repeat this step daily for a few days.

Step 2: Introducing Hands. After a little while, your rats should become comfortable with your scent. Many of them end up using the tissue for bedding. This is when you can start introducing your hands. Make sure to approach them in their habitat slowly and steadily. Be sure your hand stays within their sight to avoid scaring them. Place your hand down flat near to them. Repeat this step frequently and consistently.



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Step 3: Treat Giving. When your rat is used to your hands in their habitat, you can start offering them treats. If they are comfortable enough you can try placing the treat on your palm. If this seems too much for them, try placing it towards the tips of your fingers and as they become more comfortable gradually move it further back onto your palm over repeated sessions.

Step 4: Petting. When your rats are comfortable taking treats from you, you can try petting them. Approach them steadily with your hand in their sight before gently stroking their back. If they run away, take a break then repeat this step until they are comfortable with being petted.

Step 5: Selecting The Next Technique. Once these steps have been successfully completed, you can move on to one of our other techniques to begin handling your rats outside of the habitat.



The Food Giver Technique

This is a simple method that most rat owners will use and is likely to succeed. The basis of this technique is letting your rats come to you for treats. This is a vulnerable situation for a rat, so once your rats are happy to take treats from your hand inside their habitat it's usually the right time to start picking them up and taking them out of their habitat. This technique of trust training can be slow, but it's one of the easiest methods of gaining trust with your rats over time.

Step 1: Let Them Settle. When you get your new rat, it's really important to give them the time to settle in and get used to their new habitat and surroundings. Allow them a minimum of two days before moving on to step 2.

Step 2: Treat Training. At first your new friend may be nervous around you, so start by slowly approaching them with your hand. Hold a treat between your thumb and fore finger and offer it to them. Repeat until they begin to accept the treat. Once they are happy taking treats from you, begin to move your hand further away to make them come to you. Continue this until your rat begins to come to the door for treats. This may take some patience; take your time.

Step 3: Holding. Once your rat is coming to the door for treats willingly, begin to place the treats in the palm of your hand instead of between your fingers. It may take them some time to feel comfortable climbing onto your hand. Once they are, gently scoop them up with both hands; make sure their bottom is supported. Do this for short periods of time at first to get them comfortable with being held.

Step 4: Field Trips. Once your rat is comfortable being held, you can graduate to taking them outside of the habitat to a secure location where they can run around freely. Make sure to be present in the area so they can get used to running onto your lap. Repeating this step more than once a day will speed up the process; however, the key is consistency.

The Neutral Space Technique

This technique involves allowing your rats to free roam in a safe area from which they can't escape, while you are present in the area. The difficult part will be limiting your interaction with them as you want them to come to you once they are ready. This technique may be best for a more outgoing rat or for continuing trust training after a little success with another technique.

Step 1: Let Them Settle. When you get your new rat, it's really important to give them the time to settle in and get used to their new habitat and surroundings. Allow them a minimum of two days before moving on to step 2.

Step 2: The Neutral Zone. Before attempting this technique, you'll want to establish a safe neutral zone, such as a bath tub (with the plug in) or a couch. Anywhere that your rat won't be able to run away is fine. The next step is to transport your rat from their cage to this neutral zone. You can do this using a carrier if they are not yet comfortable being held. Treats are a good way to entice them into the carrier.



Step 3: Staying Neutral. This step involves a bit of patience, as you'll need to repeat it many times. Once your rats are safely in the neutral zone, you should sit down and get comfy, but do not interact with them too much. Allowing them this time around you to get used to your presence is important. You will eventually see their confidence grow as they begin to run and climb on you. Be sure they are comfortable with these activities before starting step 4.

Step 4: Holding. As your rat becomes braver around you, you can start to gently stroke them and touch them as they run and climb on you. Once they are comfortable with this, you can begin to attempt to pick them up. Eventually you will be successful with lots of short and frequent attempts. In time they will become comfortable with longer intervals.

