**Rat Tickling Basics**

**What is rat tickling?**
Rat tickling is a handling technique that was developed to study play and positive affect. It mimics rat rough-and-tumble play by using a human hand to playfully “wrestle” a rat.

**Why tickle rats?**
- Improves rat positive affect, handling, & welfare.
- Reduces handling time, stress, fear & anxiety.
- More effective than other techniques
- Social enrichment, especially for isolated rats

**How to tickle a rat**
Bring the home cage to a surface and remove hard enrichment items. Begin with your hand resting in the cage for a few seconds before starting the procedure below.

1. **Dorsal Contact**
   - Use one hand
   - Tickle on nape of the neck
   - Light/brisk movements

2. **Flip**
   - Use your index finger in front of a leg & thumb/middle finger behind legs
   - Flick your wrist to turn
   - Hold loosely, but firmly
   - Don’t kink the tail

3. **Pin**
   - Hold rat down loosely
   - Move fingers quickly & vigorously w/ light pressure
   - 2-4 seconds per pin
   - 4-5 pins for 15 seconds

**WHAT NOT TO DO**
- Be too hesitant/slow/gentle
- Be too rough
- Contact the rump, (aggression is directed here)

**Positive Responses**
- Approach & follow your hand
- Light nibbling at the fingers
- Relaxed bodies and tails
- 50-kHz vocalizations (use a bat detector)

**Negative Responses**
- Avoidance & running away
- Defensive postures
- Tense bodies and tails
- 22-kHz vocalizations (use a bat detector)

For more information see: [LaFollette et al. 2017. Rat Tickling: A Systematic Review. PLOS ONE](https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0177410)