
Bonding Rabbits

What is Bonding, What to Expect, Understanding Bunny Language, and Bringing Newly Bonded bunnies Home



What is Bonding?

Rabbits, by nature, are **territorial** animals and have the natural instinct to defend their space. Their territorial nature makes it so that they need to learn how to trust and accept another rabbit into their space. Rabbits need to meet each other outside of their regular habitat, in a neutral environment where neither rabbit feels the need to defend their space. A neutral space will allow the rabbits to get to know one another and form a relationship.

Rabbits are also **hierarchical** creatures. When bunnies live in pairs or groups they form a hierarchy, with one dominant bunny and another submissive bunny. The dominant bunny is considered the “boss” of the group. Some rabbits immediately take on a submissive role and allow the other rabbit to be the boss, while others take

time to figure out who is the boss and who is the follower. Much of the bonding process consists of the rabbits working out who is the dominant one and who is the submissive one. Our job when bonding rabbits is to give them the space to decide who will be the boss, while also keeping them from getting into true fights and hurting each other.

To sum it up, bonding rabbits is all about them figuring out who is the boss, accepting their place in the relationship, and learning to trust one another.



Important Information about Bonded Rabbits

Bonded rabbits should never be separated, they should go everywhere together in the same carrier, even the vet. If one bunny is sick you must take both rabbits or you risk breaking their bond. Make sure that you treat both rabbits the same- if you're giving treats, give each rabbit a treat, pet each rabbit equally, etc.

What Happens When Your Bunny is on a “Bunny-Moon” With Us?

After we have identified a bunny who has a compatible personality with your bunny, they will stay with us for a short period of time called a “bunny-moon”. Typically this lasts about one week, but may extend a few extra days if your bunnies need more time to get to know one another and establish their hierarchy.

During this time, the rabbits will stay in an enclosed space. We will start them out in a small area to avoid territorial behaviors and to allow us to stop any fighting quickly and safely, if it were to happen. They will be continuously monitored by our staff.

While your bunnies are with us it is important that you take this time to clean your bunny's area at home to create as neutral an area as possible. This means washing any blankets or rugs in your bunny's area, thoroughly washing the litter box and food dishes and wiping down their area using a mix of vinegar and water. This will help make your space more neutral and cut down on territorial behavior once the bunnies come home.

Bringing your newly bonded bunnies home

It is normal to see some small setbacks when bringing newly bonded bunnies home, we set the foundation for the bond but the work needs to continue at home. We recommend following the steps below to ensure for a successful transition home:



1. Clean your bunny's area prior to bringing the bunnies home
2. Start the newly bonded pair or group in a room that is not your previous rabbit's main area, if possible. Or, start them in a room that your bunny spent the least amount of time in.
3. The rabbits should start out in a small pen with just a litter box, water dish, and enough space to comfortably stretch out- approximately half an X-pen.
4. Once you have observed three consecutive days of no negative behavior (excessive chasing, nipping, fur pulling) you can expand the pen by 1 panel.
5. After you have expanded by 1 panel continue to look for three consecutive days of no negative behavior and expand by one

more panel.

6. Repeat this process until you have expanded to the maximum size of the X-pen. This process should take about three weeks.
7. If at any point you see excessive chasing (chasing that lasts more than 30 seconds, escalates to circling, or results in fur pulling) go back one step and make the x-pen one panel smaller.
8. After about one week, you can begin to introduce toys. These toys should be new to both bunnies. Watch for any chasing or lunging- if you see this take the toys away and try again later.
9. Once they are successfully sharing toys you can introduce hidey houses and boxes.
10. It is common to see rabbits chase each other when food comes out- if you see this you can try to scatter feed (scattering the food around the floor of the pen) rather than placing food in a bowl.
11. To help cement the bond you can hand feed both bunnies at the same time and give them pets together.

Understanding bunny behavior and body language

For the most part rabbits are not vocal animals so they use their behavior to communicate with one another. What may look like aggression, such as chasing, is actually the bunnies communicating with one another.

Chasing

Chasing is something that you are almost guaranteed to see at some point when you have bonded rabbits. Chasing can mean a few different things and it is important to understand when to and when not to intervene. Intervening too much can setback the bonding process and not give the rabbits the chance to sort through their disagreements.

Typically chasing is a dominant behavior where one rabbit is chasing and the other rabbit is running away. This lasts 30 seconds or less. This type of chasing is the bunny's way of reminding their bunny friend that they are the boss. You should let them work this out and not intervene unless the chasing lasts more than 30 seconds. This type of chasing is not aggressive and the rabbits are not hurting each other.

Chasing should be stopped if it lasts longer than 30 seconds, if the rabbits are making contact with one another, or if chasing turns into circling.



Circling

Circling is where one rabbit begins to chase another rabbit, but instead of running away, the second rabbit tries to chase the first rabbit—resulting in the bunnies moving in a fast circular movement. When bunnies are circling one another you will often see fur pulling and nipping. This should be stopped as soon as the chasing turns into circling. To interrupt the circling, pet each bunny to calm them down. You can also move them into a smaller space for a short period of time until they have settled down and are not chasing or circling.

Humping/Mounting

One bunny mounting the other is a normal part of the bonding process. This is one of a few behaviors that rabbits use to assert their dominance. This is normal bunny communication and you should not intervene unless the humping is excessive (lasting longer than 30 seconds or the bunny is humping the other bunny's head). If humping turns into circling you should also stop it by petting both bunnies together.

Nipping

Nipping is another dominant behavior and typically does not hurt the other bunny. In early bonds, the dominant bunny may be seen lightly nipping at the other rabbit. They may nip at their back or side areas.

Digging

This is a dominant but aggressive behavior where one bunny uses their front paws and digs at the other bunny's back. If you see this you should stop the bunny by nudging them off and pet both bunnies to redirect.

Behavior	What to do
Chasing	If longer than 30 seconds, you should intervene. Pet both bunnies until they have calmed down. Place both bunnies close together, so that they are touching, and pet them together- this helps associate the positive feeling of being petted with the presence the other bunny
Humping	Do not intervene unless it lasts more than 30 seconds or the bunny is humping the other bunny's head. If more than 30 seconds, nudge the top bunny off and pet the bunnies together in close proximity
Digging	This should be stopped- nudge the digging bunny off and pet both bunnies together in close proximity
Circling	If chasing or humping turns to circling- it should be stopped. Pet both bunnies to interrupt the circling and calm them down. Place them next to each other so that they are touching and pet them together. You may need to reduce their space if the circling is frequent. Scatter feeding pellets or another treat can be a good distraction

If you have any questions about your newly bonded bunnies, reach out to us. We are happy to help!

