

Bonding Bunny Rabbits:



Have patience, take your time, always on neutral territory, and don't give up too soon!

What you **DO NOT** want to do is plop the new bunny rabbit into your existing bunny's cage or area. Never try to introduce rabbits in one of their cages as the existing rabbit can feel uncomfortable and get very territorial and defensive.

The Initial Interaction:

The initial introduction is done to determine how fast or prolonged the bonding process will be.

- Just like people, rabbits have very different personalities and different ways of building relationships. Depending on the rabbit, the initial bunny date can go a couple different ways. In the end though, the two bunnies will decide who will be the dominant one and who will be the submissive one. Let them decide, and don't worry, they will!
- It is important that both bunnies are spayed and neutered prior to meeting. Females may take up to a few months to no longer be hormonal. Males often recover from their neuter surgery quicker, within a few weeks.
- Make sure to have food available for both bunnies. This helps them feel more comfortable and makes it a more positive experience.
- The quickest bond is usually, but not always, between a neutered male and spayed female. Two males and two females are often more difficult to bond, but not impossible!

Some standard SAFE bonding behavior (of any gender combination):

Ignoring. This is a very good sign for bonding and could very well be the start of a great relationship for the two bunnies!

Chasing. This is how the two bunnies determine who will be the dominant one and who will be the submissive one. The male is not always the dominant one. In fact, the females are very often the more dominant one in a female-male bonded duo.

Mounting. Yet another form of displaying dominance. It can be either the male or female doing the mounting. You can allow them to do this as long as the other bunny is not getting defensive. If the other bunny is getting irritated or starting to nip the mounter, you can clap your hands to distract them, or gently push the mounter off with a dustpan.

Nipping. Some nipping is okay. Often the mounter will nip when mounting, and you may see some fur pulled out. This is okay unless they begin to run in a tight circle after each other. Then you should use a dustpan to separate or throw a blanket over them, then use a dustpan to separate.

Some very GOOD bonding behavior signs:

Mirroring. This is when one rabbit copies the other's behavior. For example, one rabbit laying down right after the other flops down (even if on opposite sides of the neutral space or room), grooming independently after the other bunny starts grooming themselves, playing, eating etc. This is a great sign, and you will usually see them get closer and closer until they are doing these things with each other!

Grooming. Grooming of any kind, whether independent or together is always a good sign. **Mutual grooming of each other is the most obvious and important indicator of a bonded pair.** One of the bunnies, the dominant one, will put their head down asking the submissive one to groom them. This is shown in the picture below:



During their bonding date, they will probably both put their noses down and ask for grooming at the same time, attempting to see who will be the first to claim dominance and the first to be submissive. Feel free to reach down and pet both of their heads at this time, and eventually one of them will be chinning/grooming the other's forehead and you won't have to! This is an example of what that looks like:



****When to separate them?** Blood is drawn or a wound is inflicted. However, remember that some nipping or minor biting can be quite normal, and even little tufts of hair in the mouth can be normal. If they are circling in a "bunny tornado" though, you should separate immediately.

After The First Interaction:

- Continue to keep them in separate enclosures that are right next to each other, but with enough

space that they cannot get to each other and fight through the sides of the exercise pen/enclosure. Continue to also take them out of those enclosures and put them both in a neutral space to socialize and bond. This can be the same spot as the initial interaction. Example of the "duplex" exercise pen living:



- Another important thing to do when they have separate enclosures is to **SWAP the bunnies**. This means taking **only** the bunnies out and swapping them into each other's enclosures, leaving all their belongings there for the other bunny to sniff and get used to the scent. Continue to also put them together in the neutral area for more dates/socializing though!

- If in their neutral space they seem to have established who is the dominant bun and who is the submissive bun, with no more nipping and chasing, feel free to go ahead and put them in the same enclosure! This may take days, weeks, or even a few months before they are ready to be living in the same space together. Make sure this enclosure is not the same as one of their "duplex" exercise pen areas though. Make sure to clean all their bowls and toys before creating a single home/space for them to go in together. **Supervise** them in their shared enclosure to make sure all is well!

- **One clear sign of bonding is grooming (licking) each other and chinning each other, especially when one bun has their head down and the other bun is licking and chinning the other one's forehead/face. Another good sign is if they are sharing food!**

- If they really are **not** compatible and continue to fight, you may need to always keep them in separate enclosures. Sometimes just having a neighbor bunny in another enclosure nearby is all a bunny needs to be content.

****Best of luck and congratulations on your new bunndition!****

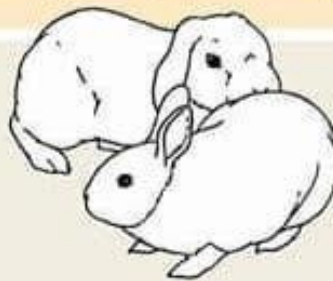
Neutral Territory

Rabbits must be introduced on neutral territory - a space neither rabbit usually has access to - to prevent territorial aggression. When rabbits meet they have to establish whether the other rabbit is there to challenge them for territory or to form a social group, and if it's the latter where they fit in the social hierarchy. This process can take several days, and you'll see them progress through different behaviours.



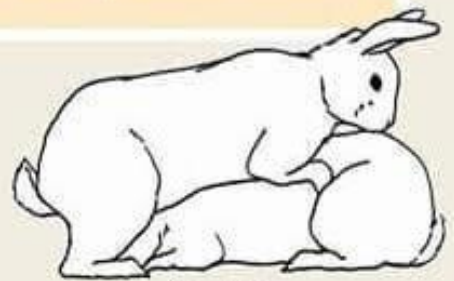
Ignoring

Rabbits may begin by completely ignoring each other. Despite appearances, they are actually paying close attention, waiting to see what the other rabbit will do and signalling they aren't a threat by being non confrontational.



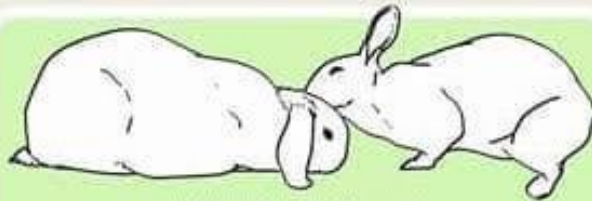
Chasing

Most introductions involve some chasing. The chasing rabbit is saying 'I'm the boss', and if the other rabbit moves out the way they acknowledge this. Chases are usually short dashes and slow hops interspersed with more ignoring..



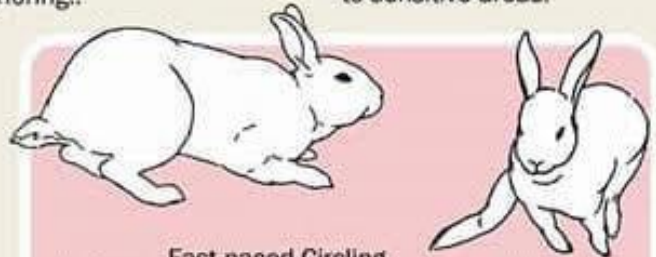
Mounting

Both male and female rabbits (even when neutered) use mounting to establish hierarchy. It's normal and will lessen over time. Mounting backwards (as pictured) should be discouraged though, to prevent bites to sensitive areas!



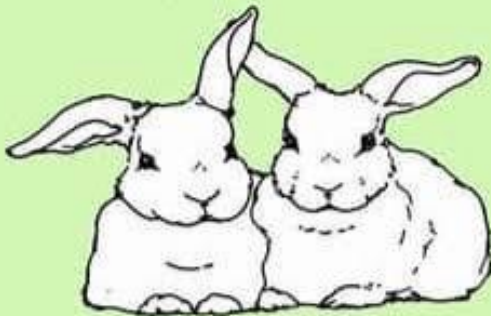
Requesting Grooming

Grooming is often the first sign of friendship. Rabbits ask to be groomed by stretching their head forward, chin on the floor. Sometimes a request will be ignored and sometimes one rabbit will do all the grooming. Either way, that they are thinking about grooming at all is a sign they are quite relaxed.



Fast-paced Circling

If both rabbits attempt to chase each other they can end up rapidly circling almost nose to tail. This can turn into a fight, so it should always be interrupted and the rabbits separated.



Snuggling

Once rabbits have made friends they frequently rest in contact with each other or close by.



Fighting

Rabbit fights are fast-paced as they spin and tumble over each other biting and kicking. Rabbits should immediately be separated and checked for injury.



Bonded: Happy in each other's company they can move to their permanent living space.



Separate: Aggressive towards each other - seek expert advice before continuing.