

Bonding Guinea Pigs



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

What you **DO NOT** want to do is place the new guinea pig into your existing guinea pig's cage before they have gone through the bonding process. Never try to introduce guinea pigs in one of their cages as the existing guinea pig can feel uncomfortable and get territorial and defensive.

The Initial Interaction:

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

- Get a large **bath towel or a blanket**. Put the towel/blanket in an area outside of the piggy's cages, in neutral unfamiliar territory (couch, floor in a room they aren't usually in, etc.).
- Place some **veggies or a few treats** in the middle of the towel/blanket.
- It is helpful to have two people, with each person holding a pig, sitting at opposite ends of the towel/blanket. Make sure the towel/blanket is between you and the other person, and there is a good amount of space.
- As kids and/or other people in the room stay quiet and out of reach. This is to avoid other distractions.
- Let the pigs find each other on their own time. You may need to nudge them in the right direction. Have another towel handy to toss on the pigs if you need to separate them.
- More often than not, pet owners want to break up guinea pigs exhibiting normal dominant **mounting behavior**. Everyone looks worried and asks, "Is that normal?" And be prepared to answer the question, "Mommy, what are they doing?"
- Usually, the first 10 minutes is just the guinea pigs getting acclimated to the new surroundings and the idea that there is another guinea pig there. It's the next 10-15 minutes that can get interesting where they might begin to display behaviors listed on the next page. But, do try to keep your interactions and interference to a minimum.
- Some guinea pigs will get along great from the first interaction on. However, most will go through the standard dominance behavior of getting to know each other and trying to figure out who is going to be the boss of who. They must be the ones to decide this, and don't worry they will. It may not be on the first interaction, but it will get decided.



****When to separate them?**

Some nipping at each other can be normal, but if it escalates, then definitely separate. Even little tufts of hair in the mouth can be normal. If there is constant teeth chattering for minutes and circling each other, it is probably best to separate also. Try to separate **before this behavior** escalates so that they do not remember these meet-and-greets as a negative experience.

Behavior:

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

Rumble strutting (a low rumbling noise they make)

Butt sniffing

Butt nudging

Chasing

Butt dragging (they are leaving their scent)

Mounting (any which way: rear mount, head mount, side mount)

Nose face-offs (higher in the air wins, one must lower their nose to be submissive to the other)

Raised hackles (hair on the back of the neck and along the spine)



Leading up to possible fight, battle for dominance is escalating:

Teeth chattering: (signal of anger, aggression, warning)

Nips (light bites, may result in little tufts of fur in their teeth)

Wide yawn (but this is no yawn, they are showing their teeth)

Snorting (like a strong puff or hiss)

Fighting:

Bite attacks (no longer warning nips, they are lunges with intent to harm)

Combination of raised hackles, loud and angry teeth chattering, rumble strutting in place with the head staying in one position while facing the other guinea pig doing the same thing. Usually a signal of a biting attack. But they may back down before they engage.

Both pigs rear up on their hind legs, face to face (this is a clear, brief signal of their intent to launch at each other. Separate if possible before the attack)

Full battle (This is rare but the pigs are locked together in a vicious ball of fur. Separate immediately, but be careful. Throw a towel over them or something other than your hand to separate them so you do not get bitten in the process.)

After The First Interaction:

- Continue to keep them in **separate enclosures** but also continue to do meet-and-greets in a neutral location.

- If they seem to have established who is the dominant piggy and who is the submissive piggy, with no more nipping or teeth chattering, feel free to go ahead and put them in the same enclosure.

- One clear sign of bonding is **grooming (licking)** each other and also **sharing food** out of the same bowl or pile of veggies.

- You may want to have a divider in the shared enclosure at first and see how they interact by sniffing each other through it. However, if you feel they are doing really well after their interactions in the neutral space, you can try to put them in the same enclosure without a divider and just supervise for a while to make sure everything is going well.

- 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 piggy in another cage nearby is all a piggy needs to be content.



Best of luck and congratulations on your new guinea pig!



Thank you for choosing and supporting the Oshkosh Area Humane Society!