



BONDING BASICS



SO YOU WANT TO FIND A BUN COMPANION FOR YOUR SINGLE BUNNY!

Bonding is a three-step process. The process is started at the Orphanage and will continue at home for the next couple of weeks. In a few weeks your buns will be inseparable.

1. **Getting to know you (at the Orphanage)**
2. **Getting to know you and moving in (at home)**
3. **Happy ever after**

With experience in bonding for over 25 years, we have come to the following conclusions

- A neutered male and spayed female are the most stable bond.
- A mature male rabbit must be desexed between 1 to 3 months before attempting to bond. The hormones can be active in some male buns for up to 3 months after desexing
- Same sex bonds may work if the rabbits are elderly or placid, but there is not guarantee
- Sometimes same sex bonds can work with young rabbits, if the males are desexed at 3 to 4 mths before hormone development, but there is no guarantee the bond will last.
- Male bonds can be unstable, even with siblings, and the bunnies can fight intermittently.
- All rabbits can have disagreements from time to time, but male/female are less likely to fight once the bond is stable.
- Sibling bonds can be stable if the male rabbit is desexed at 3 to 4 mths, and females are desexed at 4 to 6 mths.

GETTING TO KNOW YOU

Not all rabbits like each other or are a good match together. This is because there will always be a dominant in a pair and a hierarchy in a group of rabbits. If there are two dominants, they will fight. Rabbits have a range of subtle communications using scent and body language. We need to provide a supervised space for them to get to know each other where they can approach each other or escape if they are scared.

The bonding space

When we start a bond, we create a neutral space where neither of the rabbits have been before

The space is set up as a simple obstacle course, a bunny tunnel, a cat scratching box/post (to hide), two hay trays and a water bowl. The space needs to be large enough for the bunnies to move away from each other if they are worried or can approach each other as they get to know each other.

Arranged marriage

Humans will have an idea of the type of rabbit they want to bond with their rabbit. We can certainly note your preferred rabbits, but it is ultimately up to your rabbit who he or she chooses as a lifelong friend. Sometimes arranged marriages work and sometimes they do not, as it is based on compatibility and the level of dominance in both rabbits. Sometime a rabbit can be dominant and demanding of humans, but placid and submissive with another rabbit.

Rabbit communication

Understanding the subtle communication between rabbits is crucial during the initial introduction. If the rabbits do not like each other then they may attack each other. The experienced bonder will use both intuition as well as reading the rabbits behaviour and intervene when needed to prevent stress or potential injuries.

These behaviours may be evident in a bonding environment. Sometimes one rabbit will be quick to display a behaviour and can get upset if the other rabbit does not respond.

- **EARS BACK, TAIL UP:** sign of aggression, may attack or warning to other rabbit to stay away, bond is unlikely to work
- **HIDING IN A CORNER:** timid or afraid, they need time to get to know the other bun
- **FLAT TO THE GROUND:** submissive pose
- **GROOMING:** grooming the other rabbit is a sign of submission
- **MOUNTING THE OTHER RABBIT:** dominant or excitement to have a friend (not hormone driven), I will protect you if there is a threat. Mounting behaviour may also be displayed from excitement over food or concern for their bonded mate
- **PUSHING THEIR HEAD UNDER THE OTHER RABBITS CHIN:** this behaviour is telling the other rabbit that “I am the boss, you must groom me” The boss in a relationship will always push the other rabbit to safety and address any perceived threat. When both rabbits do this there is a tussle for dominance.
- **THUMPING:** Disapproval, in a bonding environment this indicates that the rabbit does not approve of the other rabbits behaviour and wants it to stop. They will teach their mate that they do not like this behaviour. Thumping can also indicate fear or attention seeking in another environment.

SETTLING IN AT HOME

If the bond is progressing positively at the Orphanage, then it is time for the bond to continue at home. Do not separate the rabbits under any circumstances until you speak to us. Separating them will mean that they will need to start the (getting to know you) bonding process all over again.

The 3 day (minimum) honeymoon period

There are three important points to consider:

- **Dominance shift:** There is a risk that your rabbit may become dominant when your rabbit returns home to their familiar environment
- **Toilet training:** You will need to allow your new rabbit time to adjust to their new home (within your home) and to establish a routine for toilet training and hay and treats.
- **Human interaction:** The bond is still in progress and you need to allow your rabbit and the new rabbit to have time together with minimal separation or human interaction

The bunny home space

The space must be large enough for the rabbits to continue to get to know each other, with obstacles to hide, run through and get away from each other if needed.

Move things around in your rabbits space, so that they explore the space together.

Do not let the rabbits out of their pet fenced enclosure for a minimum of 3 days.

- This will give the new rabbit time to work out which is their home and which is your home.
- This will establish a routine of feeding and toilet, place an extra tray where needed in the bunny space.
- This allows the new bunny and your rabbit to get to know each other in your rabbits environment
- The rabbits may drop around their rabbit home for a few days after going home, this is normal and a way of marking their home. For this reason it is advised not to let them out into your home space for a few days, or they may claim your home as theirs and continually mark your home with their droppings. Droppings in their bunny space should subside as they settle down together.

Human interaction

Please prevent any children from entering the rabbit space for a few days, if you are patting one rabbit, make sure you pat both.

Feed the rabbits together and once they are settled and using their hay/litter trays they can explore into your space. If they are territorial over food, then place two food dishes into their space separated so that they can eat in peace.

Happy ever after

This should be the briefest stage of bonding. Once the rabbits start to venture into your space, the bond is in the final stage. When the rabbits are having time outside their bunny home, you will need to observe the new rabbit's behaviour for chewing and other unwanted behaviours.

In time when you know what your rabbits will do, you may be able to remove their pet fence completely and they can come and go from their space at will. This will depend on the makeup of your family and the presence of pets or young children.