



HOW TO HELP YOUR RABBITS BOND

Advice for bonding rabbits

Rabbits naturally live in large family groups, with a central female and one male rabbit with all their relatives. They work together to create a comfortable area to live in and also help to look out for dangers and predators.

This behaviour is still present in the pet rabbits, so it is important to keep rabbits in bonded pairs to reduce stress and encourage natural behaviour, ideally this pair should be one castrated male and one neutered female. As even bonded brothers could start to fight when they get more mature and develop more of a territorial instinct (castration may not remove this urge alone).

How should I go about getting a bonded pair?

Ideally pick one rabbit you like in the rescue centre/pet shop/breeder, and then observe the group of rabbits together to discover which one of the rabbits are friends with the one you picked. Then make sure you pick one of the friends to make a up the pair.

That will make for a smoother transition to a new home.

Hopefully the rescue centre/pet shop would have already neutered them and had them vaccinated.

What do I do when I am looking for a new rabbit to live with my current rabbit?

Ideally bring your rabbit with you to the rescue centre, so the rabbits could meet on neutral ground. Hopefully there will be a cage next to the other rabbits so the rabbits can smell and see each other. Do not pick the rabbit which is acting aggressively towards your rabbit (jumping, biting, stomping, razing around with tail up).

Start with keeping the rabbits next to each other in good sized enclosures with a double mesh fence between them (so they can smell and see each other, but not injure each other). Observe them closely for a couple of days to see how they get on being neighbours. During these days it is important to “Scent swap”, do this by swapping blankets and litter trays over to get the rabbits used to the smells of the neighbour.

When they act calm as neighbours you can place them in a enclosure (2x2 meters ideally) or a cornered off section of a room. Ensure there are hides with two openings, a non slip floor

surface, and hay available in at least 2 different areas, in addition to two sets of water bowls/bottles. It is best to avoid treats and pelleted food at this stage, as this may lead to food aggression.

It is important to remember that this area has to be on **neutral ground**, it is very important that neither rabbit has been in this area before.

Keep a constant eye on them for the first hour, and then every 15 minutes for the rest of the day. Have a medium sized towel available, and be ready to separate the rabbits if needed.

Hopefully they will hop around and explore the area. They may just sit still and appear to be ignoring the other rabbit. This is an ok sign.

Keep a look out for tufts of hair (indicating biting), stomping, grooming behaviour and eating. If all is calm at bedtime then it may be safe to let them stay together overnight. Ensure you check them closely every day for any signs of fighting, such as wounds on the skin.

But if they fight right away then they need to be placed back in their neighbouring cages for a few more days. If you introduce them again a few days later and they still do not like each other then it is unlikely that they will ever become friends.

What do I do when one (or both) of the rabbits needs to go to the veterinary hospital?

When they come in for their health check and vaccinations it is important to bring them in together on the same day. And if they do need to come in for surgery, such as neutering, then it is even more important that the bonded pair stay together.

If only one out of a bonded pair is brought to the vet he or she will have a different smell on their coat (such as the smell of the veterinary staff, the skin cleaning solutions and the medication) when they return home. This smell and the stress of being separated can lead to the bond being broken forever and the rabbits could fight quite viciously.

When the companion rabbit is in the hospital with us we will only keep them separated for a short time as possible. And we will try to keep the bonded rabbits within sight and smell of each other as much as possible.

Please do not hesitate to give us a call with any concerns regarding your pet rabbits.