



## RABBIT TO RABBIT INTRODUCTION AND BONDING

Despite enjoying one another's company, rabbits can be territorial. This can make rabbit to rabbit introductions a little bit more challenging. The time and process needed to successfully introduce rabbits to one another will depend on a few different factors, including the order in which you acquire your rabbits. Prior to introducing your newly adopted rabbit to another rabbit, it's always best to make sure each rabbit has been spayed or neutered. Delay the introduction about two weeks following surgery, as this allows any residual hormones to dissipate prior to introducing them.

### Types of introductions

Any combination of rabbits can live together, whether they are both males, both females, or female and male. Male with female coupling is the most natural because this is how they typically form in the wild.

1. **Male and Male:** Can be a difficult introduction with possible fighting but not always.
2. **Female and Female:** Two female rabbits will likely get along faster than two males but fighting can occur. Introduce them slowly and separate if needed.
3. **Male and Female:** It is easier to bring a female home to a male rabbit because female rabbits are quite protective of their territory. Many times this will work very well, but there can be fighting until the bond is established.
4. **Two Babies:** Probably the easiest to bond. If you adopt your rabbits at a young age or get them already paired together, it doesn't matter what sex they are because they are likely to bond with ease. They may even be bonded when you adopt them.
5. **Baby and Adult:** If the adult's personality is passive, this will work well.
6. **Introducing a Rabbit to a Rabbit Already in Your Home:** If you introduce a female to a male, this goes very well. Introducing a male to a female can be more difficult.
7. **Introducing Two Rabbits to Your Home at the Same Time:** Usually easy, even if they are the same sex.
8. **Three or More Rabbits:** This will vary quite a bit and is dependent on the sexes of the rabbits and the individual personalities of the rabbits (passive or aggressive). This will also vary in difficulty if two of the rabbits have been bonded prior to introducing the third rabbit.

### STEPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL AND LOW STRESS RABBIT TO RABBIT INTRODUCTION

1. **When You Get Your Rabbit(s) Home:** Each should be placed in a separate crate/cage. Place the crates next to one another with a few inches in between. If you immediately put them both in the same crate/cage, you might trigger a fighting response, especially if you are putting a new rabbit into a resident rabbit's cage. Territorial instinct will kick in with the resident rabbit and a positive relationship may be compromised if not lost altogether.
2. **Should You Plan on Having Both Rabbits in the Same Cage:** Create a new, "neutral" cage that has been cleaned and disinfected, with new bowls, bedding and furniture in it. Put the resident rabbit in it first, then (after cage by cage introduction) then the new rabbit in second.
3. **The Close Proximity of the Cages:** Will allow the rabbits to entertain their curiosities as they sniff one another through the bars. If all seems well at this point, you can move the cages closer together, allowing for the rabbits' noses to actually touch. They may also display courtship behavior including honking and circling. They should become more relaxed after a little while and may even lie down "beside" one another on their respective sides of the cages. Expect this to take 2-3 days. If the

acclimation period takes longer, feeding them close to the touching edges of the adjoining cages may be all the encouragement they need to get comfortable with one another.

**4. The Introduction Process Takes Time:** Go slow. Introducing one rabbit to another too quickly may result in injury to one or both of them and will damage the relationship, compromising the bond. Watch your rabbits for when they are ready to meet face to face. Depending on the personality of your rabbits, this process may take a few days.

**5. Introducing Rabbits Face to Face:** Once you think the rabbits are ready to see each other face to face, you need to find somewhere that is unfamiliar for both of them. This will allow them to meet on neutral territory. Places in your home such as bathrooms are good for the rabbits' introduction. Try not to stand looming over them during the introduction as that may cause stress in one or both of them. Instead, crouch down to their level and be still/quiet. Keep the room cleared of any breakable or unsafe items and it is best to have a box with holes cut out for the rabbits to get away from one another if needed.

**6. Watch Them Closely:** especially upon first introduction. It is fairly normal for both rabbits to be cautious of one another at first. One rabbit will then take the lead and assert its dominance over the other. They may approach the other, sniffing, circling, and possibly trying to mount the other rabbit, which is a play for dominance. If the mounting rabbit is at the head of the other, separate them immediately, as injury to the mounting rabbit's genitals can occur through biting.

- Though rare, the two rabbits may actually attack one another. To protect yourself, you should always wear thick gloves. Quick intervention will keep them from hurting one another. If this happens, separate them into separate cages and start the introduction again, from the point at which it was going well. The most ideal occurrence entails the rabbits approaching one another as equals, sniffing and nuzzling one another. There is not much to do after that.

**7. Fighting:** Rabbit fighting is fairly obvious when it happens. The rabbits will jump at each other and start clawing, biting, hissing, and trying to harm one another. Nipping at each other is not considered fighting. This is a way for them to communicate with each other, to get attention, and to show curiosity. Mounting and circling may, however, turn into fighting. If the mounting rabbit is facing toward the back of the mounted rabbit, separate them quickly, as this can cause damage to the mounting rabbit.

### **Following the First Introduction, What Should Happen Next?**

- **It's a Bond!:** If there is no fighting or signs of stress, proceed with moving them into their new living space. If harmonious living continues, nothing else is required.
- **Possible Friendship:** Keep an eye on them while they are in the same space without barriers between them but separate them into separate cages when they are not able to be supervised. If there is no fighting, they are well on their way to a successful bond.
- **Mating Behavior:** If there is mating behavior (mounting), the female may reject him and become aggressive, in which case the introduction period may need revisiting and could take longer. If the female retreats or runs away after the mating attempt, separate them and try again later. If she does not reject him then it is promising for a successful relationship. If the retreating rabbit retaliates or the aggressor makes contact, either or both causing injury, separate them and try again in a day.
- **Fighting:** When two rabbits fight, regardless if they have just been introduced or have been coexisting for a while, then you must prepare for a full introduction period. You can use a squeezable water bottle to discourage fighting (a short stream to the initiator of the fight is enough).

**Bonded Rabbits:** The loss of a bonded partner rabbit can be very traumatic to the rabbit left behind. Closely bonded rabbits spend most, if not all, of their days sleeping next to, grooming, feeding next to and playing with one another. The sudden cessation of these activities, brought on by the disappearance of the partner, can have very adverse effects, including lethargy, loss of appetite, disinterest in normal activities or play etc. There have even been cases where the partner left behind passes due to the loss. When adopting a rabbit that is bonded with another, it is expected that they be adopted together.