



**RSPCA Milton Keynes
& North Bucks Branch**
Registered Charity No. 275415



HOW TO BUILD A RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR RABBIT

You may think that rabbits will just learn to love you like a dog would. Perhaps you were told to “handle it each day” to make it get used to you? Let’s bust out the truth about befriending bunnies!

Rabbits are prey animals, unlike dogs which are predators. This means rabbits are less likely to trust you without a concerted effort on your part to make friends with them.

Rabbits are naturally nervous animals and easy to scare, so your approach to them must be gentle and slow. They are intelligent and inquisitive, so we can use those traits to gain their trust but be prepared for this to take time and lots of it!

1. Let the rabbit know that you are there.

When you start to approach your rabbit, start talking to them. Speak softly and gently so that they become aware of you. Try clucking or kissing noises too.

2. Stay Low and move slowly

To gain trust with a new rabbit, try crouching down and keeping low as you approach them. Move slowly and don’t make any loud noises. Keep talking to your rabbit in a friendly, quite voice.

3. Let your rabbit approach you.

When you are nearer to your rabbit, stop and allow your rabbit to come toward you in their own time. If they don’t approach you then don’t force them. It may take a while for your rabbit to start to trust you, but after a few days they will learn that it is safe to approach you. Repeat this gentle approach until your rabbit comes over to greet you.

4. Show your rabbit your hand (and treat)

Hand feeding is a great way to encourage rabbits to come over and interact with you. Gently and slowly outstretch your arm and hand. Move it towards your rabbit but keep it level with their eyes and off to one side so that they can see it. Let your rabbit take the food offered.

5. Allow them time

Over time your rabbit may allow you to pet them but be prepared to wait until they get used to you. The more time you spend with your rabbit the quicker they will get learn to trust you.

Gradually you can start to make contact and increase it each day. Start by gently moving your hand to the cheek or forehead. Gently rub these areas and watch how your rabbit reacts. If they stay with you, then try moving your hand slowly to the shoulders and back for strokes. Try not to make any sudden movements.

Never chase a bunny when it runs away. Let it go and encourage them to start approaching you again.

6. Getting used to being touched

Stroking a rabbit and picking it up are two separate challenges so don't rush. Allow your rabbit time to adjust to their new home and to being touched all over before you attempt to pick them up. When your rabbit is comfortable with you then you can start to get them used to being lifted.

Basic Rabbit Behaviour

It's important to learn the basic signs of rabbit behaviour so that you know when your rabbit has had enough or wants more!



Bad Signs

Thumping the ground with the back foot. This can be an expression of displeasure, fear or a warning to others that there is a danger to them.

Biting. Young bunnies sometimes give gentle nips that don't break the skin or leave a mark. This means he wants to play, but if a rabbit bites and breaks through your skin or leaves a mark then this is a warning that whatever your doing is making him angry. Stop immediately.

Grunting is often followed by scratching and biting and is usually a sign that the rabbit is not pleased.

Tooth Grinding. This indicates discomfort, pain or stress and is often accompanied by a hunched posture. Your rabbit could be sick.

Lunging. This is a sign of disapproval and dislike.



Good signs

Gentle nips from young rabbits can indicate that they want to play. These nips are soft and do not leave a mark on the skin.

Licking. Your rabbit likes you!

Tooth clicking. This noise is created by the gently chattering of teeth and means your rabbit is very content and happy.

Nose nudging often means pet me or give me attention.



Don't!

Never sneak up behind your bunny.

Don't force your bunny to receive attention or be picked up.

Don't make loud noises.

Rabbit Aggression

Each year rabbits are given up because the owner considers them unapproachable and aggressive. They become neglected, yet rabbit aggression is can be corrected. Here is a list of common reasons for aggression.

1. Neuter or Spay

At about 4 months old rabbits mature and their behaviour can change. Neutering or spaying can help reduce aggressive behaviour, particularly towards other rabbits.

2. Pain

Rabbits will often become aggressive when they are in pain so get your pet checked if they suddenly become aggressive.

3. Confinement

Rabbits need space and lots of it! If they are left in unsuitable, cramped cages they may develop health problems resulting in pain. They will be unhappy and frustrated on top of that and often display aggression as a result.