

Bonding Rabbits After One Has Passed On

A rabbit owner wonders if it is a good idea to bond a new rabbit to a grieving rabbit.

By Caroline Charland

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Q: My sole female rabbit, Bunny, died a little over a week ago. She was bonded to Murphy, one of my male rabbits. Murphy is doing pretty well considering, but he seems to be missing his close relationship with her. I have two other male bunnies that I was hoping to eventually introduce and have bond to each other. Is there any chance that Murphy will accept one or both of these boys as friends? Would it be easier to introduce one at a time or try all together at once? Or will Murphy only want another girl as a friend? Murphy is a Mini Rex approximately 5 years of age. The two boys are a lionhead dwarf approximately 1 year old and a dwarf approximately 2 years of age. Bunny was a Mini Lop and close to 9 years old.

A: Rabbits go through grieving just like people do. I find it is best to bond another rabbit (or rabbits) as soon as possible to the grieving rabbit. Rabbits often seem to sense that there has been a loss and tend to bond easier in this case. Of course all rabbits do need to be spayed or neutered before doing an introduction.

Male and female rabbits tend to bond easier than two males or two females. But I have bonded all sorts of combinations.

You first want to do a bunny date. These need to be in a small area in a neutral territory (where none of the rabbits have been before). Often the bathtub works well, or an exercise pen in a room where the rabbits don't live. It is important to be very careful as rabbits are territorial and often fight when first meeting. So, sit with the rabbits, stroke their ears and heads, and talk to them in a calm voice. Never leave the rabbits alone until you know they are bonded. Even if they seem like they are getting along, a fight can break out at any time.

The first bunny date should be short, only 10 to 20 minutes. Always end the date on a good note, never letting any nipping, biting or fighting happen. Try to bond your rabbits together a couple of times a day, each time extending the time they are together. If they nip or bite at each other, gently move their head away before they do it. Clap your hands twice close to the rabbits to startle them and get them to stop.

After a couple of dates place a veggie salad on the ground when you put the rabbits together, this gets their minds onto something else not just each other. With time, they will groom each other and want to be together. It can take from a few days to a few weeks.

If you have trouble bonding three males together, then adopt a female rabbit to bond to Murphy, but take him on some bunny dates so he can choose his new partner.

Time and patience is what is needed to bond rabbits together. Once bonded, they will sleep, eat and play together and should never be separated.