

Confidence building for nervous rabbits...



The process of befriending your rabbit.

Rabbits are naturally nervous and flighty which can make gaining their trust a long and tricky process. Careful handling and positive experiences when they are young will go a long way to having a happy, confident adult rabbit.

My rabbit is nervous, what should I do?

How much should I handle my rabbit? Dealing with a nervous rabbit is not easy and it will take quite a long time to gain trust and build confidence. Surprisingly the approach to dealing with a nervous rabbit is a bit 'back to front'. Less really is more. People often over handle a nervous rabbit to 'get it used to being handled'. Often the rabbit is unhappy with this, will wriggle, stress and have all its fears confirmed that people are just out to constantly try and cuddle it. The right thing to do is take handling right back to a minimum. Only handle the rabbit to move it from one pen to another or to do a bottom check. Make sure the rabbit is never confined or cornered, and use a carrier to move a frightened rabbit. Just carefully usher it in. Hutches are a big 'no no' for nervous rabbits as they compound the fear of being trapped. If a hutch has to be used then you must never do anything to the rabbit inside the hutch, wait until it comes out of its own accord. A large, interesting area is a must. Exploration is a great confidence builder; they will explore a little further each day. You can spend time sitting in the area and have tasty treats on your lap to encourage the rabbit to investigate. If you are able, lie down in the run, this will make you appear smaller and less intimidating. In time the rabbit will associate you with nice things and will readily come over to investigate! This is the stage where you begin to offer the rabbit gentle head rubs. Don't be offended if the rabbit runs away the first few times. Hold your hand out and it should come back to check you out.

How much should I handle my rabbit?

Try not to over handle your rabbit. A quick cuddle once or twice a day is often enough, although some rabbits will choose to sit or lie on your lap! NEVER hold a rabbit on its back like a baby. This is called 'Tonic Immobility' and is a version of playing dead, the rabbit is NOT enjoying it.