

## Understanding and Socializing an Aggressive Rabbit

Rabbits have the general appearance of being sweet and timid however; there are rabbits that have a tendency towards being aggressive. Normally a rabbit that is provoked or in fear will run away but when there is no where to go, they may defend themselves which includes biting, growling, kicking, and scratching. Rabbits are not generally mean creatures so in order to socialize one that has aggressive tendencies, owners first need to try and uncover what is provoking the behavior.

### Causes for Aggressive Rabbit Behavior

The two most common causes for aggression in rabbits are not wanting to be handled and invasion of their territory. Without a doubt, rabbits are cuddly pets that owners want to snuggle with and hold but rabbits would rather be free to do their own thing. A bunny that just doesn't want to cuddle with a human will sometimes let it be known with a bite or growl.

Some owners may find that their bunny reacts badly when their territory is invaded such as their cage. Simply removing the food bowl or cleaning the litter box can become the battle of wills – with the rabbit usually winning. This is common rabbit behavior that can be avoided with a few tricks by the rabbit owner.

Other causes of aggression can include abuse or inappropriate handling by previous owners, little socialization when the rabbit was young, dominance, and hormones. All of these areas can be worked around but it does take patience and understanding.

### How to Tame an Aggressive Rabbit

For rabbits that are seem simply out of control, owners should work with the rabbit when wearing heavy-duty gloves. This will protect from lower arms and hands from serious injury. Always use slow movements and a calm, soft voice. If the rabbit tends to be more aggressive when in its cage, wait for the bun to come out before trying to handle it.

Since rabbits lunge forward to bite, try to keep your hands above the rabbit's head. Move your hand above the head and move towards the back of the head. When the rabbit begins to show aggression, gently push the rabbit's head towards the ground or floor. This shows the rabbit who is in control. It's typical reaction to jerk the hand away when a rabbit lunges. Avoid jerking away if at all possible.

Once you are in control and the rabbit is calm, gently stroke the rabbit and use a calm voice. In the beginning, use short sessions and increase the touching time a few minutes each day. When the rabbit has become used to your touch and voice, then you can move on to picking up the rabbit. Always pick up the bunny correctly so that it feels secure.

In between handling times, the rabbit will need to become accustomed to your voice and presence. Whenever you pass by your pet's cage, speak to your rabbit and offer a small treat. Your rabbit will soon realize that good things happen whenever you are near. If your rabbit becomes nippy whenever you try to clean the cage or litter box, simply wait until your rabbit has left its territory. You can also distract your rabbit with one hand or a treat while trying to get food bowls.

It's important to know the difference between a "nip" and a bite. Nipping is part of their behavior and can mean a variety of things. The rabbit may be bored, wanting to play, or trying to get your attention. If being held, a nip can mean the rabbit wants put down. Some owners

have luck with nippers by making a stern “screech” or “ouch” whenever their rabbit nips and placing the rabbit in their cage for a time-out. Our most aggressive rabbit became more sociable when he was given more exercise and freedom to roam. Sometimes it’s just a matter of understanding what makes your rabbit comfortable and content.

Overly aggressive rabbits tend to calm after they have been spayed or neutered. Rabbits are highly trainable but it takes consistency from the rabbit owner. Once the rabbit learns who’s the boss and no harm is intended, they become more content with their surroundings, handling, and with their owner.