

Basic Bunny Behavior

Here's a quick guide to common bunny behavior:

Bunny hop or dance. A sign of pure joy and happiness. The bunny's "dancing" can include leaping and/or spinning in the air, racing around, etc.

Bunny flop. A bunny flop is very comical and indicates a contented – and tired – bunny.

Chinning. Rabbits rub their chins (which contain scent glands) on items to get their scent on them. This behavior indicates that the items belong to them and also defines their territory. The scent is undetectable to humans.

Thumping or stomping. The bunny is frightened, mad, or sensing danger (real or imagined).

Teeth grinding. Rabbits may softly grind their teeth when they are content (such as when you're petting them). Loud teeth grinding, however, can indicate that the rabbit is in pain or is ill. Take your bunny to a rabbit veterinarian if you hear loud teeth grinding.

Circling your feet. This usually indicates sexual behavior (even when your rabbit is neutered) but basically it means "I love you."

Playing. Rabbits like to push or toss objects around. They may also race madly around the house, jump on and off the furniture, and act like children who have had too much sugar. Rabbits love toys and will play for hours with a favorite toy.

Grunting. If your rabbit grunts, it usually means she is angry – and possibly feels threatened. Sometimes, grunting is followed by a nip or bite. Some rabbits do not like it when you rearrange their cages as you clean; they may grunt, charge or even nip you when you try. They are creatures of habit and once they get things just right, they like them to remain that way.

Nipping/biting. A nip is gentler than a bite. Bunnies will nip to get your attention, or to politely ask you to move out of their way. Rabbits usually do not bite, but if one does, generally it doesn't mean that he hates you. There are many reasons that might cause a rabbit to bite; for example, he might bite if you grab at him or surprise him. A rabbit may also accidentally bite while tugging at your pant leg. Another reason rabbits bite is that they have poor up-close vision, so they may think that your finger coming toward them is food – or a predator.

To put a stop to rabbit bites, immediately let out a shrill cry when you are bitten. Rabbits do this when they are hurt. Since they usually do not intend to hurt you, they will be surprised that you have cried out and will usually stop the behavior after a few times.

Spraying. Un-neutered males will mark female rabbits and their territory by spraying them with urine. Unspayed females can also indulge in this behavior.

Territorial droppings. Droppings that are not in a pile, but are scattered about, are signs that this territory belongs to the rabbit. This behavior will sometimes occur when the rabbit enters a new environment or if another rabbit is brought into the house. It may



be temporary or ongoing. Droppings in piles indicate that the rabbit needs more litter box training.

Shrill scream. This is an indication that your rabbit is hurt or dying. Please seek immediate medical attention.

False pregnancy. Even though a rabbit may not be pregnant, an unspayed female may sometimes build a nest and pull hair from her chest and stomach to line the nest. She may even stop eating – behavior that usually occurs the day before she gives birth.

Dealing with Naughty Behavior

Don't ever hit a rabbit. It's cruel and they don't understand why they are in trouble. They can also become very angry and aggressive if provoked. Always be consistent when disciplining a rabbit and don't expect too much from them. Here are some humane things to try if your rabbit is being ornery:

- Shout "no" or clap your hands.
- Thump your foot like another rabbit.

Spaying or neutering, bunny proofing your house, and providing plenty of toys often reduces undesirable behavior. Instead of punishing bad behavior, it's usually far more effective to use positive reinforcement for desirable behavior.

This resource was compiled by Liz DiNorma of the House Rabbit Society and rabbit expert Cinnamon Gimness.