



LET'S TALK ABOUT

BONDING TIPS

BY HAPPY QUILLS

www.happyquillsrescueandrehoming.co.uk

BONDING THROUGH SCENT

1. Put an old tshirt or something that smells of you in their viv, it helps them get used to your scent
2. If you have fleece strips rub them on your skin or sleep on a piece of fleece for a couple of days, then place in viv (for scent)
3. Always handle newbie before your other hogs/pets so they can't smell them.
4. Wash your hands in unscented soap before handling. If not unscented then always use the same soap so the smell is familiar. I once got bitten on the neck as I had used a different shampoo to normal. I didn't blame the hog, it was entirely my fault, it had not crossed my mind that I would be smelling different. Remember hogs figure out their surroundings by scent and taste as they have poor eye sight. This biting behaviour was just them checking out something new, it was not malicious.
5. Always use the same environment to handle them in. So if you handle in living room keep doing that, they get scared with scent of new room. Make sure the environment is quiet to begin with. Once they start getting more confident then I start talking to them so they get used to noise. I don't like to give them sensory overload at first.
6. Have separate blankets for all your hogs so they have their own smell around them

LOCATION IS KEY

1. As above try and keep to the same location each night for handling your hogs. Some get quite distressed if taken to a different room. Preferably be in the same room as their viv as the smell will reassure them.
2. For newbies I prefer lying on my bed with them, rather than placing them on my lap. I place them close by and let them uncurl in their own time. Most get curious and eventually walk up to you and have a good sniff. I don't interact with them at this point, just let them sniff around. I find bed easier than sofa as more room for them to move around and less likely to fall off the edge.
3. Hogs like a routine, so always handle around the same time of day if you can. This helps minimising grumpiness due to being woken up.



GENERAL TIPS

1. Food is a good motivator. If you know something they like to eat then put it in front of the tight ball. They will eventually associate you with something good. You can also give them a treat once they go back in their viv to help reinforce them with the idea that “that wasn’t too bad”.
2. Be patient. When Shadow, a foster of mine, was handed in I was told he took about an hour to unball. They were correct, but after two weeks with him I had it down to 10-15 mins, at three weeks five mins. Even if you only see their nose, it is still small progress.
3. Keep your movements slow. If moving hand/ finger towards them then do it slowly and in front of their face (never from above). If on my bed once they start unballing I start inching my finger very slowly towards them. At first they will just ball up again. Eventually they start sniffing, licking (biting) your finger. At this stage I don’t move my finger, I let them feel safe. After a week of this tactic being successful I will try a few cheeky chin rubs. If you are really lucky, put your hand flat in front of them, they might reward you by walking on it.
4. Allow your hog to explore you. Let them use you as a human mountain. By “checking you out” they know you are a safe area.
5. Do you have a bonding bag ? Basically a snuggle sack with a strap so you can wear around your neck ? Some people swear by putting them in them as much as possible and carrying them around so they get used to noise and scent. Some hogs don’t settle in them and just pop all the time, but many handlers recommend them. Bonding bags help get them used to movements, the sounds of your house, whilst still feeling safe and secure in the pouch.

6. Watch their behaviour closely. Like humans, some hogs have off days. My own boy Ink is a lovely guy, but occasionally he is in a grump. On these days I pop him back in his viv after a quick handling. Hogs do bite, but by monitoring their behaviour I manage to prevent a lot of them. For example, I will offer up a finger to sniff. I watch them closely, you can usually see if they are about to lunge and chomp on you. I do allow them a couple of licks, but then remove as they like to chew on what they want to anoint on.

7. When watching behaviour I look at things like their breathing (how frightened they are), listen to their noises, look at colour and consistency of their poop, how much they have eaten etc. I do not like stressing them out. If I get a new foster that is a grump I generally start with 15 mins and then extend the time each day

8. Give them a bath. Yes most hate it, but it's a great opportunity for you to offer your hand as an escape route. You will be their saviour. I find I can touch the grumpiest hogs faces etc when they are desperate to get out of the bath. This doesn't always work. I once had two very scared fosters at the same time, the first happily let me stroke him, touch his spines etc and save him from the bath. The second just got stressed in the bath and still didn't want to be touched (most do though) Doesn't have to be a full bath, can also be just a foot bath.

9. Once they start interacting a bit more and unballing I start trying to handle them in my hands/ putting in my lap/ on my chest etc. Just slow steps to increase their confidence. Some hogs get reassured by the sound of your heartbeat so placing them on your chest is a good option.

10. Figure out what type of hog you have. Some are cuddle monsters, some prefer to just free roam, some are just naturally grumpy. If they like to run around then I will sit on the floor so they can interact with me when they want, occasionally pick them up to stroke them etc, but they will never become cuddle monsters if that's not their nature.

11. Talk to your hedgehog and let it get to know your voice. Talking to your hedgehog while holding, snuggling, bathing, and other enjoyable activities will help your hedgehog associate the sound of your voice with comfort and enjoyment.

12. How you pick up your hedgehog makes all the difference. If getting them out of their viv don't just grab them, let them smell your hands before you attempt picking them up, so they know you are not a predator. Gently scoop them up by placing your hands either side of their body, this way you will not hurt them. Eventually they will become used to being scooped up and will often shuffle themselves onto your hands as you go in for the scoop.

In summary, it takes time, patience, endurance to bond with our prickly friends. Some will always be grumpy, but that's does not diminish the bond you can create with them. Remember huffs are a hogs way of communicating, it does not always mean they are grumpy. Some hogs can have perfectly relaxed quills and still huff and puff. Besides, who doesn't love a little steam train?

