

# Boroughbred Behavior Resources



## Issue: Bonded Pairs

Bonded pairs have varying definitions across animal shelters. Some shelters label pets as bonded if they enjoy each other's company, whereas others define pets as bonded if there are signs of behavioral decline when separated. Animal Care Centers of NYC follow the latter definition and use it more as a diagnostic tool.

Bonded pets have a strong attachment to one another and will show signs of anxiety and depression from separation. These pets don't have to be related to bond, however they have typically lived together for many years. These pairs usually do everything together; they eat, sleep, and play together. It is detrimental to separate them if one or both of them becomes stressed, anxious, or depressed without the other around. Keeping them together ensures the well-being for both of them, though it should be acknowledged that this level of attachment often involves high levels of anxiety and insecurity.

### How does Animal Care Centers of NYC determine if pets are bonded?

Many pets come in together but we don't label them as bonded unless their previous owner provides us with information that indicates there is a disadvantage from separating them, or if we discover a strong attachment in the shelter. If the owner reports that the pets, either one or both, become depressed, lose appetite, become anxious, display destructive behavior or show signs of stress upon separation, we'll take note of this for our Behavior team. We rely heavily on owner surrender information because it's easier to identify stress or behavioral decline from separation in a calm, home setting rather than in a busy shelter environment with lots of new stimuli. For example, if one of the pets needed to be hospitalized for a severe medical condition and the other pet at home starts to pace back and forth to look for them, is having a hard time connecting with the owner, or is showing signs of depression, those are some red flags that the pets may be bonded.

We also evaluate bonds in the shelter by separating the pair and observing the result, monitoring their behavior. It can be challenging to determine whether pets are bonded in shelter, especially when they're already exhibiting signs of stress from being in a new environment, but typically if we find that both pets show the same level of comfort and sociability when separated that they do when together, we consider them appropriate candidates for single adoption. We still like to recommend adopters adopt them together, but it isn't a requirement. We do our best to keep pets housed together in the shelter if they came from the same home and get along well together, as long as we can adequately and safely house them together. Pair housing can help reduce stress while in the care center, even if the pets are separated for adoption into their new home.

### It's so sad to see sibling pets get separated, why can't we bond all siblings?

Bonded pairs often take a much longer time to find a home together. People rarely look to adopt two adult animals at a time, which means their prospects are more limited. If they have to spend a long time in a high-stress environment, it can impact their ability to form healthy relationships with other pets and humans. If we believe the pets are likely to connect with potential adopters and be adopted more quickly on their own, we may separate them so they can find homes more quickly. Some pets may also have unhealthy bonds. For example, if one of the pets is too pushy or aggressive, the other may not fully flourish. The passive pet will likely have a lack of confidence that will only continue if kept with their counterpart. In cases like this, separating the animals is highly beneficial in the long run.

It is human nature to want to keep sibling pets together, however making it mandatory for adopters to adopt all sibling pets together can be a detriment to the pets we are working to rehome.

## Why should I adopt a bonded pair?

Adopting a bonded pair has many benefits. When bringing them home the first time, they're likely to thrive and keep each other company during a potentially scary transition period. They'll always have a buddy to keep them entertained. They have a playmate to exercise, explore, and keep each other busy when their owners are away, which can prevent destructive behavior and separation anxiety. If a pair is truly bonded, the benefits of keeping them together highly outweigh the drawbacks. You'd also have double the fun and cuddles, so consider adopting a pair of animals today (whether bonded or just good buddies)! The most important thing is to find a pet or pets who suit your lifestyle and complement your family well.

### For more information:

International Association of Animal Behavior Consultants: <https://m.iaabc.org/>

Certified Applied Animal Behaviorists: <http://corecaab.org/>

Certification Council for Professional Dog Trainers: <http://www.ccpdt.org>

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