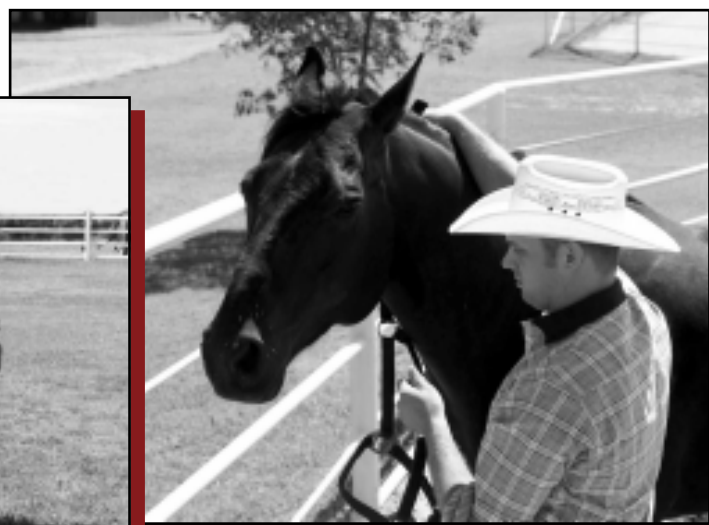


# Techniques for Safely Handling Horses



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Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service

Division of Agricultural Sciences  
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# Techniques for Safely Handling Horses

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Horses have long been used by people for transportation, work, and recreation. While horses have served people well for all these uses, they can easily injure people. Whether employed as a worker on a horse farm or handling horses as part of a personal hobby, a person can decrease the possibility of injury through the use of safe handling techniques.

The intent of this manual is to identify several of the techniques for safely handling horses from the ground. Areas covered include handling a horse when stationary, leading a horse, catching and haltering, tying, handling feet and legs, and using restraint methods. Written text is accompanied by pictures that identify important points for each of the described techniques.

Handling methods have been developed that reflect how horses perceive and respond to their environment. People need to understand certain behavioral traits before handling horses.

## Part One

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### Understanding Horse Behavior

Handlers can expect certain similar behavioral traits among all horses. These traits are passed down genetically or are learned from experiences in early life. Knowing how horses respond to their surroundings provides a base for developing safe handling techniques.

#### *How Horses Respond to their Surroundings*

Horses are very perceptive to sounds, sights, movement, touch, and smell. They have long survived on the ability to quickly recognize and respond to threats of danger. This ability has both advantages and disadvantages when handling. We capitalize on their sen-

sitivity for developing a wide array of training behaviors. However, this ability also allows for quick, unwanted responses to unfamiliar sights, sudden sounds, quick unrecognized movements, and strange smells.

Horses focus on objects in front of their bodies similar to how people see. However, eye placement along the side of the head allows them to concurrently focus on two different fields of vision along their side. Horses do have areas along the body where vision is restricted. There is a blind spot directly in front of and under the head. The horse has marginal sight along the side of the hips, and cannot see directly behind its body unless it turns its head and neck to the area.

The horse has a well-developed sense of hearing. This allows for soft voice cues when trying to calm a horse, or louder, sharper cues when negatively reinforcing a bad behavior. The horse will direct its ears toward a sound, and handlers can observe ear placement to acknowledge where the horse is directing its attention.

The sense of touch is also highly developed in horses. Sensitive areas are the head, the ears, the flank, and the lower legs. Gentling techniques such as brushing and rubbing will help to desensitize these areas and increase the horse's acceptance to handling.

#### *The Fight or Flight Response*

Horses respond to what they perceive as danger by grouping together, fighting the threat, and/or fleeing the area. To the horse, danger is something that has invoked fear in the past, or something new or different that is not understood. Even objects that are familiar to horses can cause adverse reactions if placed in an unfamiliar location.

The most common reaction for horses is to try to escape or flee the area. They may run over handlers or objects with little regard to their personal safety or that



of humans. Even though the impulse to escape from unfamiliar environments is reduced through training, the horse's quick reaction time and physical advantage of size requires handlers to continuously practice safe handling techniques.

Horses interact in herds where fighting is a frequent part of social order. When aggressive, horses may strike, kick, bite, or run toward the animal, person, or object. We can reduce the horses' aggressiveness towards people by building security and respect through handling and training at early ages. All horses can become aggressive, some more frequently than others. Stallions, mares with foal, older horses with little previous handling, young inexperienced horses, and horses at feeding time are more apt to fight human handlers.

## Part Two

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# Handling and Moving around a Stationary Horse

Your responsibility as a handler is to control the horse's movement and to provide a safe environment for the horse, yourself, and any people standing around the horse. An understanding of the general behavior of the horse and how it can be trained to consistently react to stimuli is imperative for safe handling.

### *Where to Stand*

Standing directly in front of a horse is unsafe for three reasons: 1) A horse has a blind spot directly below its head, so activity around the area is likely to

*Standing directly in front (area inside white rope) is unsafe, as a horse 1) has a blind spot directly below its head, 2) can easily run over the handler, and 3) may strike forward with the front feet.*



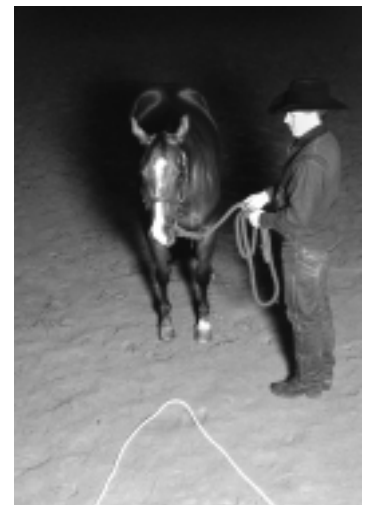
*Standing directly behind a horse is unsafe (inside the white rope area) as the horse 1) has a blind spot directly behind its body, 2) may move backwards quickly if frightened, and 3) may kick behind its body.*

frighten a horse. 2) A horse will often flee by moving forward when something alerts it from the side or back. If positioned in the path of escape, handlers can quickly be run over. 3) If a horse becomes aggressive, a common response is to strike forward with the front feet.

Standing behind a horse is also unsafe because of the horse's restricted vision. Also, horses may kick behind the body or along the side of the hindquarter.

The best position to stand is along the side, in line with the horse's head, throatlatch, and upper neck. However, horses watch both sides of their body at the same time. Movements or objects on the opposite side

*The recommended position to stand when handling a horse is to the side, facing the horse's head, throatlatch, and upper neck.*



of the handler will be reacted to quickly, and the horse's path of escape may be toward the side of the handler.

With this in mind, when stationary, you should stand at a three-quarter angle to the horse with your feet pointing toward the horse's neck or shoulder. This helps to maintain eye contact with the horse and see the off side. Facing away from a horse is unsafe because the horse can react before you are aware of any movement.

### *Handling a Horse While Another Person is Near*

Handlers must be aware of others located in the horse's area. They are responsible for protecting others if a horse becomes reactive. There are two safe areas for others to stand around a horse: far enough away to avoid the horse if it becomes reactive or immediately next to the horse's body. The safest distance is a minimum of one and one half times the height of the horse's hip. This distance should keep the person out of range from the horse if it becomes reactive or aggressive. However, working around horses requires people to be closer.

The safest distance when standing closer is immediately next to the horse's body. When possible, one hand should be kept on the horse. If necessary, this hand can be used to push away from an aggressive or frightened horse.

The most dangerous place to stand is two to three feet from the horse, about the distance of an outstretched arm. The horse's quick reaction time allows the horse to move before the person can respond. This



*Handlers should stand immediately next to a horse when working around it, preferably with one hand on the horse so they can 1) quickly feel if a horse begins to move adversely and 2) push away from the horse if necessary.*



*The most dangerous area for another to stand by a horse is the distance of an outstretched arm as it 1) allows a reactive horse to jump into the person's area quickly and 2) allows a horse to turn and strike or kick the person easily.*



*The safest distance for another person to stand around a horse is a minimum distance of one and one half the height of the horse's hip.*

distance also puts a person in range to be easily pawed or kicked if the horse becomes aggressive.

How a handler and another person respond to a reactive horse partly depends on their location around a horse. Handlers should attempt to restrain the horse from moving forward by cueing the horse to back up. Usually the response to a reaction from a frightened horse is to pull the horse's head toward the handler. This action swings the hindquarter to the opposite side.

If a horse becomes reactive when the handler and another person are located in the front on the same side, the person should move away from the horse's body at a slight rear angle. This angle allows the person to move away from the direction of the horse's hip and away from the movement of the handler.



*When another person is in the same area as the handler, their escape path away from a reactive horse should be at a slight angle to the rear.*



*The handler should always be on the same side of anyone standing at the rear of the horse. The person's escape path from a reactive horse is directly away at a slight angle to the rear of the horse, as the handler moves the hip the opposite direction.*



*When another person is in the opposite front area of the handler, their escape path from a reactive horse should be at a slight angle to the front to avoid the horse's hip movement.*

If a horse becomes reactive when someone is located on the opposite side in the front quarter of the horse, the handler should try to cue the horse to stand or back up before pulling the horse's head sideways. The person should move away from the horse's body at a slight angle toward the front so the hip movement can be avoided. Because the handler cannot protect the person as well in this situation, it is safer for the handler and the other person to be on the same side.

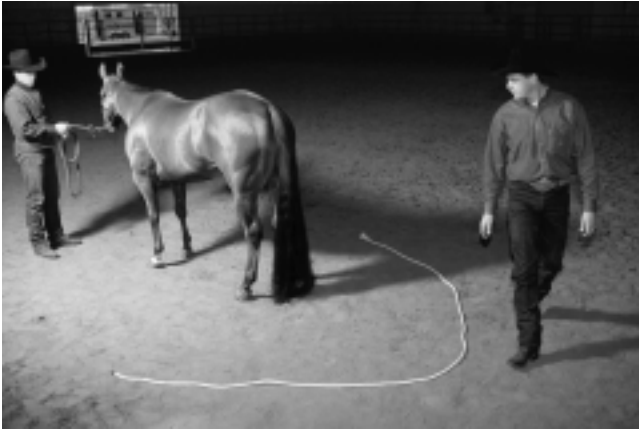
When someone is standing in the rear quarter on the same side of the handler, the person should avoid the horse by moving directly away from the hip. The handler will restrain the horse by pulling the head toward the side of the person, thus moving the hindquarter away. The escape route can be directed at a slight angle to the rear of the horse to avoid the handler.

Possibly the most dangerous scenario is when someone is standing by the horse in the rear quadrant on the opposite side of the handler. While the handler might try to protect the person by backing the horse, it usually requires the handler to pull the horse. This action moves the hip toward the other person. The escape route of the person requires quick movement away from the hip at a slight angle to the front of the horse. Pushing off the hip of the horse gives someone more distance between their escape path and the movement of the hip. Because there is not a safe escape route for this scenario, the handler should always stand on the same side of someone who is standing along the rear of a horse.

### *Moving from Side to Side*

The horse has a blind spot behind its body, so standing directly behind its body may cause a horse to react or become aggressive. Similarly, caution must be taken when moving behind a horse, even those that appear to be accepting of people. There are two safe methods to move around the rear of the horse: far enough away to avoid the potential of contact with an extended leg during a kick or immediately along the horse's body.

Obviously, the safest method is to move far away from the horse's body; however, it is a common mistake to misjudge the distance a horse can reach with its hind legs when kicking. A minimum distance of one and one half times the hip height of the horse is recommended. Closer distances allow the horse to quickly move into you or reach you when kicking.



*The safest way to move around the rear of the horse is a minimum distance of one and one half the height of the horse's hip (outside of the white rope).*



*Closer movement around the rear of the horse should be immediately next to the horse with your inside arm on the horse's hip.*

When working around horses, it is more convenient to move closer to the horse. The horse must first recognize the position of the person, so start close to the body along the shoulder. Movement from one side to the other should be made with the inside forearm on the horse's hip. Close body position should be maintained by keeping the inside hand on the horse's hip the entire time.

Close body position will decrease the chance of a horse being frightened by the person's movement. Also, if the horse does begin to kick, the leg cannot fully extend so the force of impact will be less. Additionally, movement of the horse can be detected before it actually kicks, and the inside arm can be used to push away from the horse.

People can also move from side to side by moving in front of a horse if the horse is not tied. The path should

be far enough away from the handler so not to interfere with the handling of the horse. One should never move under the lead rope of a tied horse. Movement under the lead rope can cause a horse to bolt backward and forward causing the person to be crushed or stepped on.

## Part Three \_\_\_\_\_

### Handler Position when Leading

Similar to reasons that it is unsafe to stand in front of a horse, it is also unsafe to lead a horse while in front. If frightened, the horse will likely run into the handler. If aggressive, the horse will have a direct path to strike or paw the handler. Also, eye contact with the horse is lost, as well as the ability to recognize early signs of a reaction by the horse.

The safest place to lead a horse is along the side of the head, throatlatch, and upper neck. Although horses can be led from either side, they are traditionally taught to lead with the handler on their left side. As a result, most horses will be more at ease when led from the left side. When led on the right side, most horses will act as though they haven't yet been taught to lead.

### *Handling the Lead Rope*

The hand closest to the horse should be on the lead rope, about six to eight inches from the halter, and



*Leading with the horse directly behind you is unsafe, as 1) you lose eye contact with the horse, 2) the horse can easily run over you, and 3) the horse can easily strike with the front feet.*



*The safest place to lead a horse is along the side of the horse's head, throatlatch, and upper neck.*

the rope should be slack when the horse is responding correctly. The other hand holds the remaining rope so that it doesn't drag the ground, become entangled in your legs, or wrap tightly around your hand if a horse pulls away.

### ***Maintaining a Safe Position along the Side of the Horse***

The handler's footpath should be along the side of the horse and one to two feet from the horse's path. Moving farther away from the horse will cause you to lose control. Moving closer to the horse increases the chance that the horse will step on your foot.

You should face the same direction that the horse is moving. If moving forward, face forward. If moving the horse backward, face the rear of the horse. If moving to the right side, face the horse's neck and move the horse's front to the side. Position should be maintained along the side of the horse. You should not step in front of the horse's chest when turning or moving forward or backward. The distance from you to the horse should remain constant.

If uncontrolled, some horses will move ahead of the handler. This position allows the horse to direct the path of movement. A common incorrect response of handlers is to keep contact with the horse's shoulder with the inside arm and shoulder. This response reinforces the ability of the horse to control the direction of movement by moving into and in front of the handler. If repetitious, the horse will become uncontrolled to the point that it cannot be led safely.

Pressure should be applied by moving the hand closest to the halter in the direction the horse is to move. Because horses quickly learn to ignore constant pressure, the pressure should be short termed and reinforced with additional short-term pressure if needed. Horses should be trained to move without constant reinforcement from the lead rope. With proper training, horses respond to the handler's body and hand position more than pressure from the lead.

Some horses will remain stationary and ignore pressure on the halter. A common response is to move in front of the horse and try to pull the horse forward. This action reinforces the desire of the horse to remain stationary or move away from the handler. Horses should be reinforced to move forward by other methods such as: 1) cues from someone located in a safe area behind or along side of the horse or 2) movement sideways to dislodge the front legs as the horse is cued to move forward.

### ***Handler Position when Changing Directions of Movement***

It is a standard practice in showing to require horses to be turned to the right when changing directions. If horses have been taught to move off halter pressure correctly, this guideline allows the handler to always face the horse and stay to the horse's side. If the horse is unresponsive to the halter, it may be as safe to move the horse forward and make a gradual turn to the left when moving the horse in any direction to the left.

There are two options when moving a horse to the left or right. One is to move the horse around its own



*Handlers should face the direction they are wanting the horse to move. Face the rear of the horse when backing up.*



body by moving its front away from the handler. This option allows for eye contact during the entire movement. However, untrained horses will resist by bending the neck before the body moves, thus moving the handler in front of the chest. Even though the horse's head is facing the desired direction, the movement of the body will be more forward and in the direct path of the handler.

With consistent handling practices and training, horses can be taught to turn by maintaining the position of a hind foot to pivot the sideways movement of the front legs. If taught correctly, the horse can move sideways from the handler while the handler maintains safe position along the side of the horse.

The second option is to pull the horse toward you. This is easier for inexperienced horses, especially when wanting to move left a quarter of a circle or less. However, it becomes more difficult for the handler as the turn becomes larger than a quarter circle. Movement towards the handler requires you to step sideways so eye contact and position along the side of the horse can be maintained. Horses will resist moving into a handler that is facing them and handlers become less mobile when stepping sideways. Turning away from the horse when pulling it to the left places the horse's path behind the handler.

To remedy problems when turning an inexperienced horse to the left, move the horse forward and make a more rounded turn rather than one with a sharp angle. At no time should your body be turned away from the horse or positioned in front of the horse's chest.



*Teaching the horse to move around its own body allows the handler to keep eye contact when changing directions. The handler maintains a constant distance to the side of the horse's chest.*



*Pulling a horse toward you when changing directions is easier for untrained horses. However, it can be unsafe, as the handler can easily lose eye contact and be positioned in front of the horse.*

## Part Four \_\_\_\_\_

### Catching, Haltering, and Leading Through Gates

#### *Catching a Horse in a Small Enclosure*

Horses that are housed individually in stalls are usually experienced with handling and will quickly develop a routine for being caught. Even though some find it rewarding for the horse to approach the gate and present its head to the handler, this habit can be dangerous. If a sudden noise or unusual action occurs somewhere around the stall, the horse may bolt forward through the opening. This can result in injury to the horse and handler. Even experienced horses must maintain a more acceptable routine.

Ideally, the horse should be cued by verbal commands to move away from the gate before the gate is opened. If the horse doesn't respond, the cue to move away from the gate should be reinforced as the handler is opening the gate. Once the handler is in the stall, the gate should be closed completely or the horse may use the opening as an escape route.

Because halters are made to buckle on the left side, the horse's body should be positioned so the left side is open to the stall or pen area. Approach the horse toward the neck and shoulder and place the halter or rope around the horse's throatlatch. The horse may move forward or backward. Voice cues and changes



*The habit of a horse meeting you at the gate of a stall can be dangerous because the horse may bolt forward.*



*When haltering a horse in a small area, position the horse so you have as much open space as possible behind you in case a horse becomes frightened.*



*Ideally, horses should be cued to move away from the stall gate before you enter the stall.*



*The handler should approach the horse's left shoulder and place the lead rope or halter around the horses throatlatch before the halter is placed on the nose of the horse.*

in the handler's position should be used to reinforce the horse to stand quietly. Once the horse acknowledges being caught, place the nosepiece of the halter on the horse and buckle the poll strap.

The largest concern when haltering a horse in a small enclosure is to provide as much escape area for the handler as possible. Do not move or stand between the horse and close proximity of a wall or corner of an enclosure. A frightened or aggressive horse can quickly trap a person between its body and surrounding structures.

### *Leading through a Small Opening*

Leading a horse through a small opening such as a stall door presents a dangerous situation. Horses may be apprehensive to move out of or into a stall because the areas inside and outside of a stall area can be very different. The horse's response may be to bolt through the opening or resist moving forward. If uncontrolled, the horse can easily injure a handler because of the proximity of surrounding structures.

Once haltered, the horse should be positioned beside you as the door is opened. The door should be large enough for you and the horse to move through the opening together so you can stay positioned along the horse's side. However, many openings are too small for the handler to remain along side of the horse. In that case, the best alternative is for you to open the door and position the horse in line with the right side of the opening while you maintain position along the left side of the horse's neck. If the horse can be stopped or movement can be slowed before going through the opening, you can step through before the horse and



*Position the horse to your side before stepping through a stall door. Some stall doors are so narrow that you have to step through before the horse.*

then cue the horse to follow. If this is the case, you must move quickly to the side of the opening when leading the horse through to avoid movement of the horse.

### ***Leading through a Hinged Gate***

Many swing or hinged gates are constructed to have wider openings than stall doors. You must keep position along the side of the horse when moving through the gate while maintaining control of the gate and the horse.

One option is to swing the gate completely open, walk the horse through the gate, move the horse to the other side of the gate, and swing the gate closed. Pushing the gate away from the horse in this manner can create enough movement to cause a horse to shy from the gate. Also, if the gate swings freely, it may move back toward you and the horse. If you lose control of the gate, other animals in the area might try to move through.

The recommended procedure for moving through a swing gate is similar to other gates. First, approach the gate with as much room as possible on your side. This area will allow you to step away if the horse moves sideways. Unlatch the gate while maintaining position along the throatlatch of the horse. Keeping one hand on the lead to control the horse is helpful, so latch designs should allow for release with one hand.

Open the gate as much as possible before leading the horse through while holding the gate with the hand farthest from the horse. Open the gate wide enough to allow both you and the horse to walk through without injury. Lead the horse around the end of the gate while



*Open a swinging gate wide enough to maintain your position along side of the horse while maintaining control of the gate.*

holding on to the gate. The area should be open enough so that the horse doesn't have to be backed up while moving around the end of the gate.

Once the horse is on the other side of the gate, you can push the gate closed and latch it. Again, the most important points are to maintain position along side of the horse instead of in front of the horse, and use the available space to provide an open area between you and surrounding structures. If gates are not opened wide enough, surrounding structures can injure handlers and horses. Another common mistake is to move in front of the horse as you go through a gate. Horses are very prone to move quickly through openings, so this practice is very dangerous.

### ***Leading in and out of Areas with Other Horses***

Horses tend to congregate and are quick to move toward or with other horses. This behavior can be very dangerous when leading a horse to or from areas with other horses, especially when leading in and out of gates. When moving a horse into an area with other horses, the same routine for moving in and out of individual housing areas is followed. However, the first step is to move other horses away from the gate area by use of voice commands or other cues. If horses will not move away from the area, you must decide whether it is safe to enter or if additional help is needed before moving through the gate.

Also, opening swing gates into the area where there are other horses will help to move the horses away from the gate. The handler must maintain control of the gate so the other horses will not escape. Generally, the open-



*Opening a gate into an area where there are other horses will help to move those horses away from the gate.*

ing is kept smaller so other horses will not try to escape between you and the open area.

### ***Releasing a Horse***

Horses have a bad habit of bolting sideways as soon as the halter is unbuckled. This habit is extremely dangerous as the handler can easily be run over or kicked. Handlers unknowingly reinforce this habit by quickly removing the halter from the horse's head, turning away from the horse too quickly, or encouraging the horse to turn and move off quickly. To prevent this habit, horses should be controlled until you step away. This training must be continuous throughout the life of the horse, so you must practice the same routine every time a horse is released.

First, gates should be closed and the horse moved away from the gate area. If the horse gives the appearance that it wants to run off, point the horse to the fence



*Horses should be taught to stand quietly until the handler has removed the halter and is a safe distance away.*

or stall wall. This will decrease the horse's desire to bolt. Secondly, correct any undesired movements as soon as the horse initiates them, and do not release the horse until control is gained. For example, stop the process if a horse jerks its head away from the handler when reaching for the release buckle. Regain control of the horse until the latch can be easily unbuckled and slowly removed from the horse.

Similar to catching the horse, you can reinforce control by keeping the lead rope around the throatlatch as the noseband is lowered beneath the horse's head. At this time, horses may learn to jump sideways if you simply drop the halter, so reinforce control by gaining the horse's full attention before slowly removing the rope or halter from the neck.

Handlers must be aware that horses may quickly turn and kick out toward the handler. You should quietly move away without turning away from the horse. Using fences to help restrain movement, reinforcing control before releasing, moving other animals from the area, and not allowing the horse to bolt assist in making the release safer. Horses that have been confined for long periods of time will naturally try to turn and run more quickly than horses being turned loose following forced exercise.

## **Part Five** \_\_\_\_\_ **Tying a Horse with Halter and Lead Rope**

Horses should be taught to stand tied at an early age. Foals should be taught to respond to halter pressure by haltering and leading before being tied. Training techniques routinely involve initial tying to inner tubes or other structures that allow a small amount of give when pulled. While injuries are possible in any situation, there are recommendations for tying that lessen injury potential.

First, select a place with a firm, non-slip surface that is free of debris. It is common for horses to bolt forward toward the fence once they determine that escape isn't possible by pulling backward. A solid wall may provide an advantage over fences that allow front feet to become entangled.

The height of the structure which horses are tied to should be above wither height. Solid structures that are taller decrease the desire of a reactive horse to try



*Horses should be tied with the knot of the rope at least wither height. There should be enough length so the horse can stand comfortably with its head at or above wither level.*



*Horses should be tied with a quick release knot.*

to escape by bolting forward or over the structure. The structure should be secure and able to withstand the force of pressure that horses exert if trying to pull away.

Horses should be tied so the knot of the rope is at least wither height. The distance from the knot to the halter should allow for drape in the rope when the horse is standing correctly so the horse has release from pressure.

The rope should be tied short enough to keep the top of the horse's head at a minimum of wither height. Tying a horse with a longer length of rope increases the chance for the horse's legs to become entangled in the rope. Tying too low provides a more dangerous angle of pull on the horse's neck if the horse pulls back.

The knot should be tied securely so that the length of rope doesn't change when pulled. Additionally, the

knot should be tied in a slip or quick release knot. These types of knots allow for release of the rope when the tail of the rope is pulled.

## Part Six

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### Handling Feet and Legs

Like haltering, horses should be taught to accept handling of feet and legs at an early age. Horses should be able to accept hand movement on the legs before the attempt is made to pick up their feet. Brushing, rubbing legs, and other gentling techniques will condition the inexperienced horse to the process. Even though different routines are practiced for handling feet, all should emphasize the comfort of the horse and the safety of the handler.

#### *Picking up a Front Foot*

The process of picking up a hoof begins by standing beside the horse's body facing the rear. With the inside hand on the horse's shoulder, your outside hand starts on the shoulder and moves down the front of the leg until reaching the ankle area. The horse's weight can be moved off the leg by applying a small amount of pressure on the horse's shoulder with the inside hand. The hand on the ankle cups the front of the ankle or pastern while the leg is flexed under the horse's body.

If you need both hands free to work on the hoof, move into the horse's body while placing the horse's lower leg between the knees. The horse's leg can be held in this position if your knees are kept together. Avoid leaning too far forward or backward as movement of the horse's leg can easily cause loss of balance.

The horse's leg should be positioned so the horse is as comfortable as possible. If held properly, the upper part of the horse's leg is perpendicular to the ground and directly under the horse's body. The lower leg is flexed so it is almost parallel to the ground. Holding the leg out from the body or bending the knee too much will increase discomfort for the horse and increase its desire to respond adversely.

Returning the foot to the ground is exactly the same process reversed. Step around the leg while it is flexed. The leg should be lowered with the outside hand on the ankle area, while the inside hand is positioned on the horse's shoulder. Once on the ground, the outside

## Picking up a Front Foot

1: When picking up a front foot, start with the inside hand on the horse's shoulder and slowly move the outside hand down the front of the leg. Once the hand is on the horse's ankle, the inside hand can apply a small amount of pressure on the shoulder to assist in flexing the leg to raise it.



2: Once flexed, the inside hand can hold the ankle so the outside hand can be used to clean the hoof. Avoid overflexing the knee or pulling the leg to the side of the horse.



3: Some tasks such as shoeing require the worker to hold the horse's leg between his knees so both hands can be used for work.



4: Avoid dropping the hoof to the ground; instead, place it, and return the hand up the horse's leg.



hand should move up the leg to the horse's shoulder until you are in the same position as when starting to raise the leg.

## Picking up a Hind Foot

The process of raising a hind leg starts with similar body position along the side of the hip of the horse. Start by facing toward the rear of the horse with your arm closest to the horse on the side of the horse's hip. Your outside hand begins on the hip. Run the outside hand down the back of the rear leg and position the

thumb and fingers on the back of the leg. (Placing the thumb on the front and the fingers on the back of the leg can cause dislocation of the thumb if a horse jerks the leg forward.)

Once the outside hand is on the fetlock, the hand on the hip is used to shift the weight of the horse to the other leg. The leg is raised underneath the belly of the horse until the cannon bone is almost parallel with the ground. You must step backward while raising the hind leg, making sure to keep your inside forearm and hand on the horse.

## *Picking up a Hind Foot*



*1: Start the process of raising a hind leg by placing the inside hand on the horse's hip and running down the rear of the hind leg with your outside hand.*



*2: Once the hand is on the fetlock or lower cannon bone, raise the leg under the horse until it quits resisting.*



*3: Move to the rear of the horse while holding the leg with your inside leg and outside hand.*



*4: Work on the hind foot with the horse's leg extended behind its body with the cannon bone and fetlock positioned between your thighs.*



*5: Return the foot to the ground by placing your inside hand on the horse's hip, returning the leg under the horse, setting the foot on the ground, and running your outside hand up the horse's leg to the hip.*

Once the horse quits resisting, move to the rear of the horse while holding the horse's leg with the outside hand. While moving the leg behind the horse, position the leg between your thighs so the fetlock is at the height of your knee. Your inside arm should move to a position along the inside of the horse's cannon. Move behind the horse's body until the horse's upper leg is behind the horse and the cannon bone is near perpendicular to the ground.

If moved correctly, the horse's cannon bone is positioned in-between the front of your legs. Your knees and inside hand act to cradle the hoof, your inside arm is

positioned on the inside of the horse's cannon, and your outside arm is on the outside of the horse's leg. Your shin is more or less perpendicular to the ground so your balance can be maintained if the horse resists. Your thigh is angled toward the front of the horse and your upper body is bent over to a position above the hoof. The hoof can be cradled more easily if your feet are turned slightly toward one another.

The placement of the hind leg to the ground is the same process reversed. Your inside arm is placed on the horse's hip as the leg is returned under the horse's body. The leg is held with the outside hand in a raised

position under the horse's body until the horse quits resisting. Then, the leg is placed under the horse and the outside hand is moved up the rear of the leg.

Several common mistakes cause this process to become unsafe. Raising the horse's leg with the inside hand puts you underneath the horse. Using the outside hand allows you to push away from the horse's body if necessary. Reaching for the ankle or fetlock instead of running your hand down the leg increases the horse's desire to step sideways before control is gained. Similarly, dropping the horse's leg to the ground increases the horse's desire to pull a raised foot away. Stepping toward the rear of the horse with the hind leg instead of first pulling the lower leg under the horse's body increases the horse's ability to pull the leg away before control is gained. Running your hand down the wrong side of the leg allows the horse more force to pull the leg away. Pulling the leg outward or overflexing the joints increases the discomfort of the horse.

## Part Seven

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### Using Restraint Methods to Avoid Injury

There are many different methods of physical and chemical restraint that are used to avoid injury of horses and people. Restraints are used to supplement control obtained from the halter. Methods should temporarily decrease the desire of the horse to react aggressively or attempt to escape without causing any adverse aftereffects. If used properly, dangerous situations that cause injury to people and horses can be avoided with simple, effective restraint methods.

Many veterinary medical procedures require chemical restraint. A licensed veterinarian should direct the use of tranquilizers and other drugs, as side effects can be harmful to the horse. Also, horses under the influence of medication respond differently than normal. As such, those handling medicated horses should receive specialized training.

Leg hobbles of one design or another are used to raise legs for veterinary treatment or inspection. Additionally, hobbles are used to restrain horses from vices such as pawing and kicking. Hand or rope nose twitches have proven effective for temporary restraint of unruly horses. Unless all other methods have failed, avoid twisting or pulling on a horse's ear to restrain a horse.

This practice causes horses to be head shy and resist future handling of the ears. Training should be received before attempting to use hobbles or twitches so they are used effectively and safely.

One piece of equipment that is recommended for all horse operations is an examination station.

#### *Examination Station*

Stations are used for many purposes on horse farms including washing, grooming, and injury treatment. When constructing a station, one must consider the great potential for horse and handler injury in and around the station. Sharp edges and projecting structures should be avoided.

Stations used for mature horses typically are constructed with 3" to 4" pipe frames. Length dimensions for average size stock horses are approximately 5'3" to 6' and internal widths are 26" to 32". Lengths and widths are only slightly larger than the size of the horse's body when positioned in the station. Stations that are too wide encourage the horse to attempt to turn around while positioned in the stocks.

Sides are constructed with one or more side rails of solid metal or wood. The minimum height of the sides should be level with the height of the horse's shoulder. Lower heights encourage horses to attempt escape by bolting over the sides. For average size stock horses, single railed side bar heights should be approximately 3'6". Solid sides of 3'3" are suitable for mature horses. Sides can be hinged to swing out at the front or rear, or the station may have sliding or hinged windows to allow access to specific areas of the horse's body for examination.



*All farms should have an examination station available to restrain a horse's movement.*





*A chest rope helps restrict unwanted movement in a stantion.*

Preferences for the amount of clearance beneath the door and actual door height vary. Rear door heights should keep the horse from kicking above the top of the door. They are usually about as tall at the height of a horse's stifle. Routinely, stocks are constructed with rear door heights of about 3' for stock horses. Surrounding structures, such as shelves, plumbing, and electrical outlets should be protected from horse movement into and out of stantions.

A front gate placed at shoulder height may assist in containing unruly horses. Many farms use a cotton chest rope instead of a front door. The use of rope allows for adjustment on the side rail thus allowing the horse's hindquarters to be positioned against the rear gate.

## Summary

Some of the more common tasks for working around horses are covered in this manual. Knowing how horses respond to their surroundings will help to develop safe handling techniques. Horses learn through consistent, repetitious training methods. Handlers should develop training methods that allow for safe handling and safety of others around their horses. Handlers should stay clear of the most dangerous areas around the horse and keep the best physical advantage to control the horse if it becomes adversely reactive. As with leading and standing around a horse, techniques to catch and release horses should be consistent and enforce acceptable horse behavior. Handlers must be extra cau-

tious when handling horses in small areas such as gates and stalls. When tying horses, handlers should realize the possibility of a horse harming itself if it is resistant. Methods such as handling feet and legs should be consistent, based on safe handler position, and provide the best possible position for physical control. Many different restraint methods are commonly used with horses. Many require training by experienced handlers. Regardless of the technique or method used to accomplish it, procedures must emphasize safety of the horse and handler.

## Review Questions

1. Where along the horse's body is vision restricted?
2. Why is ear placement (the direction a horse points its ears) important for handlers to observe?
3. What does the 'fight' or 'flight' response mean?
4. When handling a stationary horse, where are the safest and most dangerous places to stand?
5. When possible, where should a handler stand in relation to another person that is close by a stationary horse?
6. What distance is safest when someone moves closely behind a horse's body?
7. Describe the handler's position when safely moving a horse backwards.
8. Describe the handler's position when turning a horse to the right.
9. In relation to the horse's body, where should a handler approach the horse when haltering?
10. Describe the ideal handler position as a horse is led through a small opening.
11. What are some steps that can be taken to decrease the horse's desire to bolt when releasing him in a large area?
12. What are four requirements to consider when assessing how safely a horse has been tied?
13. When picking up a horse's foot, which hand should be used to move down the horse's leg?
14. Describe the procedure to place a hind foot on the ground.
15. How wide should a stantion be constructed?

(Look on page 16 to see where the answers can be found.)

# Review Questions and Answers

1. Where along the horse's body is vision restricted?  
*See "How Horses Respond to their Surroundings" on page 1.*
2. Why is ear placement (the direction a horse points its ears) important for handlers to observe?  
*See "How Horses Respond to their Surroundings" on page 1.*
3. What does the 'fight' or 'flight' response mean?  
*See "The Fight or Flight Response" on page 1.*
4. When handling a stationary horse, where are the safest and most dangerous places to stand?  
*See "Where to Stand" on page 2.*
5. When possible, where should a handler stand in relation to another person that is close by a stationary horse?  
*See "Handling a Horse While Another Person is Near" on page 3.*
6. What distance is safest when someone moves closely behind a horse's body?  
*See "Moving from Side to Side" on page 4.*
7. Describe the handler's position when safely moving a horse backwards.  
*See "Maintaining a Safe Position along the Side of the Horse" on page 6.*
8. Describe the handler's position when turning a horse to the right.  
*See "Handler Position when Changing Directions of Movement" on page 6.*
9. In relation to the horse's body, where should a handler approach the horse when haltering?  
*See "Catching a Horse in a Small Enclosure" on page 7.*
10. Describe the ideal handler position as a horse is led through a small opening.  
*See "Leading through a Small Opening" on page 8.*
11. What are some steps that can be taken to decrease the horse's desire to bolt when releasing him in a large area?  
*See "Releasing a Horse" on page 10.*
12. What are four requirements to consider when assessing how safely a horse has been tied?  
*See "Tying a Horse with Halter and Lead Rope" on page 10.*
13. When picking up a horse's foot, which hand should be used to move down the horse's leg?  
*See "Picking up a Front Foot" on page 11.*
14. Describe the procedure to place a hind foot on the ground.  
*See "Picking up a Hind Foot" on page 12.*
15. How wide should a stantion be constructed?  
*See "Examination Stantion" on page 14.*

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