

presented by the **American Youth Horse Council**

577 N. Boyero Avenue Pueblo West, CO 81007

800.TRY.AYHC

www.ayhc.com

help kids connect through horses

Approaching a Horse Safely

There are many things to notice about a horse before approaching them to make sure you are safe. This pamphlet provides tips on safely approaching a horse.

Blind Zones

Horses have “blind zones” where they aren’t able to see anything. The two blind zones are directly in front of the horse, and directly behind the horse. They are defined in the illustration below. It is important to recognize these areas and approach the horse from the front, but never directly in front of the horse. It is preferred that you approach the horse at an angle from its shoulder

Flight Zone

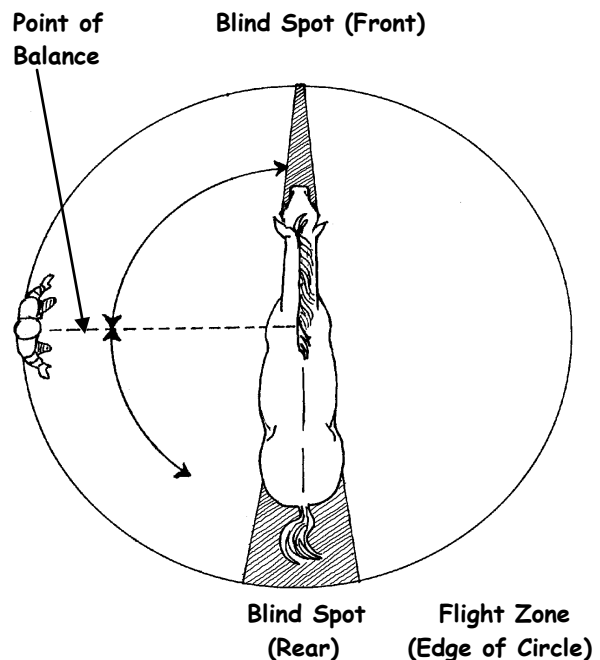
The flight zone is important to consider when approaching horses. This is the horse’s “personal space.” When a person moves into the horse’s flight zone it causes the horse to move away from the person that is approaching it. The flight zone is shown in the illustration. The size of the flight zone depends on temperament of the horse and its experience with people. With frequent handling the flight zone will decrease in size and may even disappear. But if a horse hasn’t had much handling or is constantly approached head on, it will have a much larger flight zone.

The edge of the flight zone can be determined by slowly walking up to a horse. The point at which the horse begins to move away is the edge. This is the best place for a handler to work. The point-of-balance, which is located at the shoulder, is perpendicular to the point of the

body. This is used to move horses back or forward. To make the horse move back, the handler should stand in front of the point-of-balance, and to make the horse move forward they should stand behind the point-of-balance.

Body Language and Expression

Always take notice of a horse’s body language and expression before moving towards a horse. Try to make eye contact before moving towards your horse. If the horse is turned away from you, encourage the horse to turn and face you before you approach. Learn to recognize changes in head, ear, neck, and body position, and facial expressions of the horse. These all indicate the horse’s mood or temperament. Be careful when working around the horse’s head, legs, and tail. If it becomes startled or irritated, the horse may move suddenly and injure the handler.





Safely Handling Horses on the Ground

A thorough understanding of horse behavior and proper horsemanship is essential to safe use of horses. By understanding horse behavior, you will be better able to predict and control your horse's actions. This pamphlet provides tips on how to safely handle horses on the ground.

Working

When working with your horse, it is best to tie the horse securely with a quick-release knot or have someone hold the horse with a lead rope. If a person is holding the horse, it is best for them to stand on the same side as the person working on the horse. If cross-ties are used, they need to have panic or quick-release snaps and secured with a breakable tie.

First touch the horse by placing a hand on its shoulder or neck and slowly moving towards the head while moving your hands in a rubbing action. *Always* work close to the horse and near the shoulder whenever possible. Working close to the shoulder will decrease the likelihood of being struck with a front or hind foot.

Picking up a Foot

Always let the horse know what you intend to do and do not surprise the horse with a sudden movement. When asking a horse to lift its foot, touch his shoulder and then run your hand down his leg. When you get to the fetlock, “cluck” to the horse and apply pressure on the leg. The horse should respond to the sound or slight pinch on the fetlock by picking up its hoof for you.

Once you have the horse's foot, rest it on you thigh and knee, and hold the hoof with your hand to clean or examine it. Don't lift the leg too high or pull it sideways.

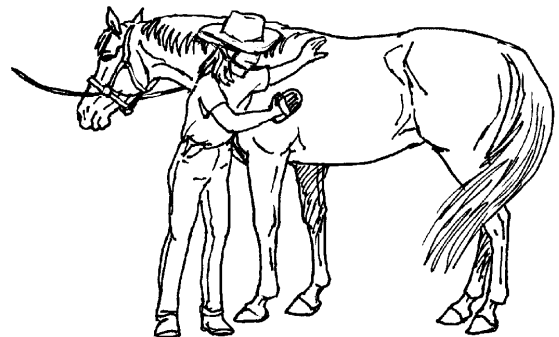
Grooming

While handling and grooming do not drop grooming tools or equipment near the horse. Place them away from the horse where you will not trip on them, and they will not be stepped on by the horse. Also, collect all grooming materials in advance so you do not have to leave the tied horse alone.

Halters

Avoid leaving halters on loose horses. It is not safe to leave a halter on a horse that is loose in its stall or turned out in a paddock or pasture. If it is necessary to do so, make sure the halter fits snugly and check it often. If a halter is too loose, the horse may catch a foot in it – especially if they are trying to scratch their head with a hind foot. It could also get caught on fence posts, or other pasture objects that may cause serious injuries or death.

Leather halters break away easier than nylon halters. If you use a nylon halter make sure it has a breakable leather section, or another breakaway feature that releases quickly if necessary. Also, some halter materials will shrink if they get wet, so make sure to check the fit of your halter regularly.





Leading Your Horse

There are several areas of safety that need to be observed when leading your horse. This pamphlet contains information that will help keep you and your horse safe when leading.

Position

When leading your horse, you should always walk beside him – not ahead or behind. The position that is considered the safest is when you are even with the horse's head or halfway between the horse's head and shoulder. It is customary to lead from the near side (left) using your right hand to hold the lead near the halter.

Extend your right elbow slightly toward the horse. This will be more comfortable if you hold the lead with your knuckles on top of the rope. If the horse makes contact with you, its shoulder will hit your elbow first and move you away from it. Your right arm should be positioned to keep the horse's head and neck straight as well as to prevent the horse from crowding you.

Equipment

Using the right equipment when leading a horse can help insure safety for both you and your horse. A long lead shank that is approximately 7 to 8 feet long should be used. It should be held by both hands. Since you are leading from the left side the excess lead shank should be held in your right hand. The safest way to hold the lead shank is by folding it in a figure-eight style or one large coil in your left hand. This helps keep you safe if the horse should become spooked and pull back. *Never* wrap the lead shank or reins around your hand, wrist or body. If the horse does panic, you could be dragged if the lead shank or reins never come loose from your hands. If you need extra control, tying a knot at the end of your lead shank aids in maintaining a secure grip when needed.

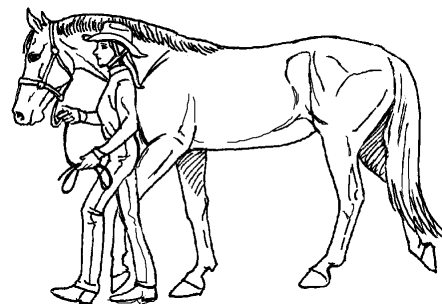
Leading

When leading *always* turn the horse away from you and walk around it. *Never* pull the horse towards you when leading. It always helps to take extra caution when leading a horse through narrow openings, such as gates and doors. Ask your horse to stop first, which will allow you to pass through the narrow opening first and then bring your horse through. Step through quickly and move to one side to avoid being crowded or stepped on by the horse.

Another thing to be cautious of when leading a horse through narrow openings is if they are saddled, the stirrups on your saddle. They can get caught on something when leading the horse, causing the horse to panic and hurt himself or you. It is helpful for either an English or Western saddle to put the stirrups up before leading your horse through the opening. This will prevent any accidents that may occur.

Turning Loose

When turning a horse loose, use good judgment to prevent any accidents. Lead your horse completely through the gate or door, and then turn the horse back so he is facing the direction you have just entered. Finally release the lead shank or remove the halter or bridle. By turning your horse loose with this procedure you will prevent your horse from bolting away when released, and it will prevent you from being kicked or run over if the horse should turn and run away.





Tying Your Horse

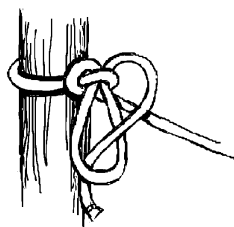
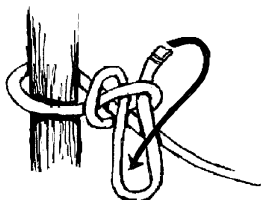
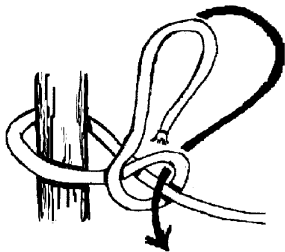
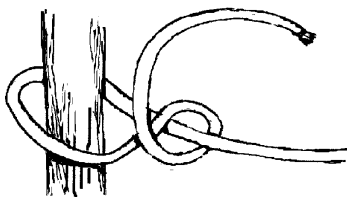
It is very important to know how to use the proper knots when tying a horse. There are two basic knots that every horse person should know. This pamphlet demonstrates both of those knots and how to use them.

Quick Release Knots

The Quick Release knot should be used whenever you tie a horse with a halter and a lead rope. There are several types of quick release knots that can be used safely with horses. This pamphlet only demonstrates two of them.

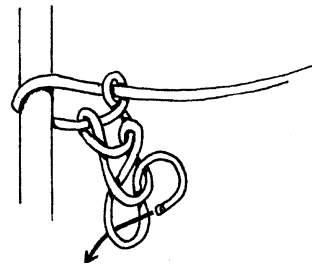
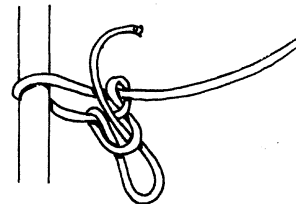
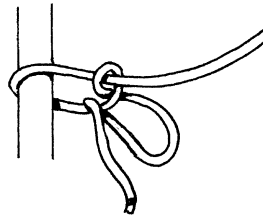
Type A

This is a relatively easy knot to use, however it may not release in an emergency. If the horse pulls strongly against it the knot may tighten. To prevent that, wrap the lead around the post twice before tying.



Type B

This knot should release quickly even if the horse pulls back hard.



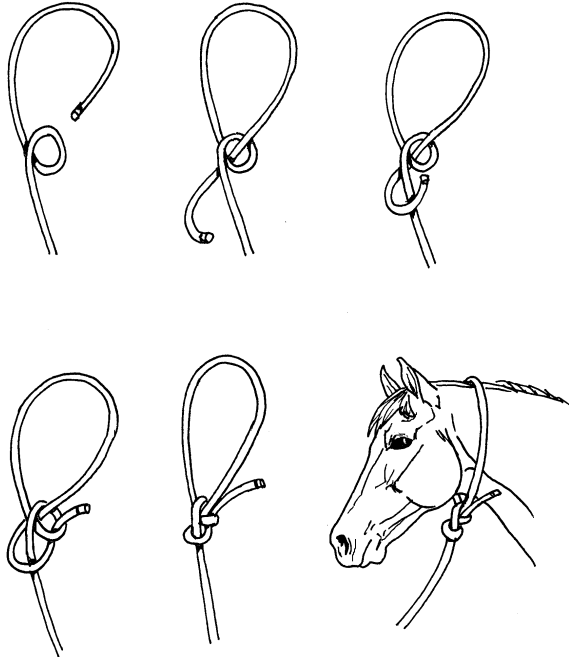
Practice

Practice both knots with an experienced person until you can correctly and safely tie a horse. If you have difficulty tying quick release knots, quick release hardware snaps (or “panic snaps”) may also be used to safely secure a horse.



Bowline Knot

The bowline knot can be used when a loop is needed that will not slip or tighten. It can be used around the horse's neck if needed.



Never tie below the level of the horse's withers. Tie your horse with a rope long enough to allow comfortable movement, but short enough to avoid the horse getting entangled or a foot over the rope. *Never* tie your horse by the reins as he may pull back and break the reins or injure his mouth. Always use a halter and a sturdy lead line when tying. Tie your horse far enough away from strange horses so they cannot fight or kick. Tie a safe distance away from tree limbs, brush, or other objects in which a horse might become entangled.

Working Around A Tied Horse

When working around a tied horse, *never* walk under or step over the tied rope. Walk around the rear of the horse, out of the kick zone. *Always* untie the horse before removing the halter.

Where To Tie

Always be sure to tie to an object that is strong and secure. This will help to avoid the danger of escape, equipment breakage, or injury if the horse pulls back. Once a horse has broken loose he is more likely to pull back the next time he is tied. Tie to a post set securely in the ground, not to a rail on the fence. If the horse pulls back, rails may break or come loose and seriously injure or frighten the horse. This can also be a danger to the handler trying to catch a panicked horse.

