

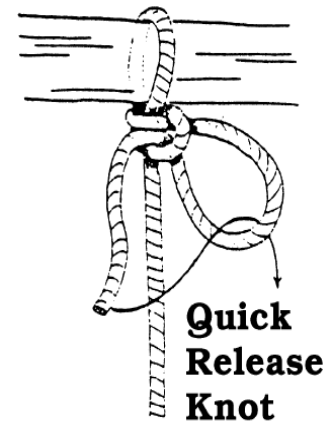
HORSE SAFETY

Introduction

At the University of Nebraska - Lincoln and affiliated Research, Education and Extension Centers, horses are used for herding cattle, research, and equestrian classes. While riding a horse in an open field brings great joy and convenience, safety must be the first priority when working with horses. Most serious accidents occur when a rider falls off a horse or when a horse kicks the handler. This SOP provides information about working safely with horses.

Handling

- Always speak calmly to the horse before approaching or touching. Horses cannot see directly in front of them or behind them (review the image in the Sources section). Seeing a person disappear and then appear suddenly from their blind spot may startle horses.
- When leading a horse, always lead from the left side of the horse. Keep the lead rope short, holding it with the right hand, and holding the rest of the rope folded with the left hand. The person leading the horse should never wrap a lead rope, reins or halter shank around their hands or other parts of the body.
- Walk around, not under, the horse to get to the other side for grooming.
- When a horse is cross tied, untie one side to get through. Do not walk under the crosstie.
- Know and use proper knots for tying a horse. The quick release knot as illustrated is used when tying a horse with the lead rope. This knot allows the handler to release the horse quickly if needed.
- Maintain horses in good condition. Regularly groom horses to keep them clean all over, including the areas between the hoof and frog. Check the horseshoe and re-shoe them regularly so their hooves are not irritating them. Grooming a horse builds trust and a bond

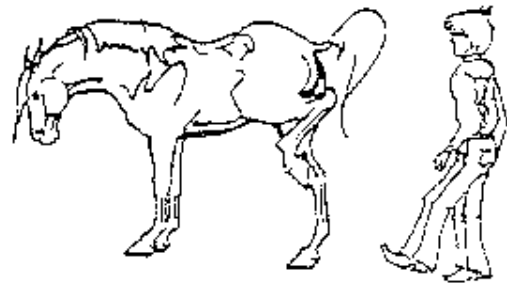


between the handler and the horse. If the horse knows he is not going to be hurt, he will be more willing to work.

- Punish a horse only at the instant he disobeys. Waiting, even for a minute, does not provide the horse understanding as to why he is being punished. Never strike a horse about his head.
- Occasionally, there are horses that are truly aggressive and difficult to work with. Those horses may not be suitable for herding cattle or riding lessons.

Avoid Being Kicked

- Unlike cows, horses can kick sideways and back. Handlers and riders should keep all body parts, especially the head, away from the “danger zone” during grooming.
- Stay close to the horse on either side when grooming. It is safer to be shoved than to be kicked. If you sense that a horse is going to kick, push away from him.
- Horses may kick exuberantly when they are turned out to pasture. To avoid being kicked, always turn the horse around to the direction of the pasture gate, and take the halter/lead rope off the horse. Be alert and quietly walk away from the horse.
- A “nuisance kicker” may ‘cow kick’ when irritated by flies, or when uncomfortable in the underbelly. Keep the horse clean and use fly spray if necessary to reduce flies around the horse.
- If a horse is overly fidgety and still needs to be worked with, have someone hold his nearside front leg up so that the horse cannot ‘cow kick’ on the same side. Some horses can ‘cow kick’ in the diagonally on the opposite side, so handlers and riders need to be on the same side as the lifted foreleg. If the horse insists on putting his front leg down, stay clear of the ‘kicking arc’ when working near his belly or rib cage.
- When working with other riders and horses, avoid getting too close to the back of a horse and rider. The other horse may get irritated and suddenly kick. If the horse is a known “kicker,” tie a red ribbon on the tail.



Wrong, approaching from blind spot

Tack

- Tack should be in good condition. Check the bridle, rein and saddle before putting them on a horse. If a rein breaks while riding, the rider may lose control of the horse. A stirrup could break during the ride and cause the rider to fall off the horse.
- Make sure that the saddle blanket and the saddle are not irritating the horse. A horse could get a serious sore from an ill-fitting saddle, and in turn, may become unreasonably difficult to work with.
- Be careful not to bang the horse's teeth when bridling or unbridling. "Ask" the horse to open his mouth by putting one or two fingers in the corner of his mouth where there are no teeth.
- Use the proper kind of bit for the training level of the horse. If using a bit which is too severe for the horse, the horse may show his displeasure by being difficult and possibly bolting. If the bit is too mild for the horse, he may not be attentive to commands.

Riding

- It is very important to match the rider with the right horse. If the rider is novice or not sure about the task that needs to be performed, a green horse is not a good choice. Horses can sense nervous riders.
- Never mount a horse in a barn or on a hard concrete surface.
- Always wear ASTM approved headgear when riding a horse. Medical studies show that the most common riding-related injuries are to the head. Protective riding hats are available for both Western and English riders.
- Pay attention to the surroundings. Keep in mind that horses have keen senses and may be startled by things unseen by the rider. Horses may also suddenly spook at ever-present objects.
- When mounting a horse, maintain light contact with his head through the reins. Horses could walk off with the rider hanging from the side and cause injuries.

- If a rider falls and gets a foot hung up in the stirrup, the rider should twist his hips and shoulders to flip onto his stomach, which helps the foot slip from the stirrup. Consider using some type of safety stirrup if riding alone.
- Pay attention to the condition of the horse. If the horse is exhausted or not feeling well, he may show his displeasure by bucking or showing another vice.
- If the horse starts bucking, try to keep his head high through use of the reins. This makes it difficult for the horse to buck.
- Wear riding boots or shoes that have a smooth sole, a closed toe, and a small heel, as this footwear is designed to slip easily out of stirrups to prevent foot entrapment.
- Consider body protective vests designed for horse riding.

Sources

- “Basic Horse Safety Manual”, Cooperative Extension Service, University of Kentucky, College of Agriculture
- Utah State University Equine Extension
- “Staying a Kick Away”, Willis Lamm, www.whmentors.org/saf/kick.html

