

HORSE CARE MYTHS & TIPS

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Crosstie Etiquette

Everyday accidents wait to happen. Etiquette is a matter of safety. Inherent to good manners is connecting. Be aware of standard practices and be disciplined about following them. Doing so will make things easier for you and will instill confidence in your horse. If a horse spooks and slips on the floor, it is not setting him up to relax and focus under saddle. What happens in the barn really does establish your horse's worldview. It pays to be proactive. This article will address good barn aisle habits. If everyone abides by them, lots of accidents and injuries can be avoided. Averting mishaps promotes soundness and success. Here are some rules to live by.

Rule 1. Breakaways need to be at the halter. Even old baling twine rarely breaks when it should. Moreover, if the intended breakaway is at the wall and it lets go, watch out! Everyone will get hit in the head. The horse will learn he is unsafe. If you put a cable tie on the halter, when the horse sits back, the one side will let go. Then, the horse will stop and the tie will drop. Breakaways of cable ties or yarn on the halter are safest. For yarn, I fold three strands in half, loop it through the halter and tie three knots. That will hold if he throws his head, but break when needed.

If a horse starts to sit back on the ties, stand back. Horses have a fight or flight nervous system. Once they snap into panic, there is no rationalizing. You can speak quietly, but get out of the way. Know you have the breakaway in place and the situation will run its course with minimal impact.

Rule 2. Wait. When passing by a horse on the ties, whether you are leading a horse or not, make sure the person and horse know you are there and wanting to pass. Be certain the horse sees you. If you are with a horse, wait for the other

handler and horse to prepare and signal you to pass. Never pass until the horses are relaxed.

Rule 3. Undo. Under no circumstances should an equine pass under a crosstie. It can be disastrous if the passerby throws his head up. Horses are prone to running backward when surprised. If the horse clips the connected crosstie, it will quickly snowball into a number of injuries. So, as a matter of smarts and courtesy, always disconnect a crosstie before another equine passes, even if it is a pony. One hand on the halter and the other on the shoulder can support the horse in position. Maintain good habits. Make it easy for the horse to do the right thing.

Rule 4. Move. In essentially every



Good grooming is listening. Teach your horse to relax to stand still on the ties. Then he can very clearly tell you when something is sore.

instance, on every aisle, the horse standing should be moved aside and relaxed before the other passes. There may be plenty of room. But, give the horse all the room you can. Be smart. Better safe than



To avoid injuries, breakaways should be at the halter, not at the wall. Cable ties and yarn, as seen here, are good options.

sorry. You can't always anticipate when a horse will spook. So be prepared. Leaving as much room as possible is wise.

Rule 5. Manage. Keep your stuff on the aisle organized. Nothing should be strewn. You don't want it to get stepped on. That would be a really easy way to have the whole scene explode instantly into a horror show, complete with carnage. Saddles should rest on racks or their pommels. Be tidy and orderly. Keep equipment out of the way.

Rule 6. Stand still. Teaching your horse not to dance on the ties is not just a matter of convenience. It sets the tone for a horse to be quiet inside, so he can relax to focus and be a willing partner. Moreover, when a horse understands what is expected of him, he can develop the confidence that

will allow him to have a big heart to win. Teaching a horse to stand still is a matter of timing. You want to intercept the thought about moving. If you correct the motion, he has already thought of several things since the inclination. A well-timed hiss or growl does wonders. As the horse moves his ear to focus on something

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Questioning

If you notice something and don't know the best way to respond, ask a knowledgeable horseman. A true horseman will appreciate your interest and be happy to help. They'll never be annoyed if you have your horse's best interest at heart. True horsemen care most about the animals. They'll appreciate your attentiveness and efforts. So, ask.

else, or shifts his weight before moving, just take his attention back with a quick, visceral sound. You'll be amazed. Think about the horse more than yourself. If you get in three prompt, quick and consistent corrections in a row, then you've established an understanding.

Often horses move a lot on the ties because no one ever asked them to stand

still before. They don't understand. Be consistent and clear in your corrections, not emotional. Once the horse realizes they should just stand, he can stop seeking. Then, the horse can relax and enjoy grooming.

If the horse does move while grooming, pay mind. Grooming should be a time of listening. If the horse is telling you something hurts, it is a lot easier to deal with a muscle knot, some heat or swelling, rather than vet bills. So, take his messages to heart. Massage, soaking, poultice, or a cold hose can stake out a much more affordable track. Ignore signs and illness or injuries may follow. Listening while grooming is an opportunity to troubleshoot symptoms before they advance to become big problems. Soundness starts with grooming well. Note changes, especially in legs and backs. Address small issues so they won't get exasperated.

There is a difference between danc-

ing on the ties and being sore. Most often, horses squirm because it has not been made clear they should stand. Vigorous currying is important for their health. It is not optional. If your horse is ticklish, start lightly. Get blood into the muscles first. Then, you can lean into it, and they'll enjoy the currying more. Some horses dance because they can. The barn aisle is not a dance floor. So, just be fair and clear.

Horses' worldview is established on the ground. If you want to have the most fun, and maybe even win, good manners are essential. They are guidelines for listening, connecting and averting accidents. Follow these rules and you'll help to establish a more fruitful relationship with your horse. With sound barn routines, the horse can be confident, which is pivotal to building big hearts that win. So, you'll enjoy more success with your horse on every level. ■



Ruthann Smith shares and discusses best care practices and product solutions of world-class grooms at Facebook.com/ShinyHappyHorses and TopTurnout.com. To make quality horse care easier, Ruthann developed the award winning Lucky Braids coat care and braiding products for Top Turnout.

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