

Tack and Attire for a Child's Horseback Riding

Our topics for this week are:

- **Proper saddles and reins for children who ride horses.**
- **Proper helmets, shirts, pants, and boots for children who ride horses.**

After picking a good horse for a child and a qualified instructor, appropriate tack and attire for child riders is very important for their safety.

TACK

Saddles

In order to learn proper balance, children should be able to hold on to a saddle, at least in the beginning. Regardless of age, no one should try to balance themselves with the reins. Because of the horn, western saddles are best for children.

Children should not be able to slide around in a saddle, especially sideways. Roughout saddles minimize or eliminate sliding in the saddle.

Back and forth movement is limited by a prominent pommel and cantle. The seat of a youth saddle is 12 to 14 inches.

Fenders need to be short enough to adjust the length so that when the child's feet are in the stirrups, the child's knees are bent enough to be able to stand and raise his or her seat about 2 to 3 inches off the saddle. The width of the stirrups should be at least 1 inch wider than the child's boot width to reduce the risk of entrapping a foot.

Youth saddles should also fit the horse. The latigos and cinch should be long enough to properly fit the horse. In general horses are better for children than ponies. Although there are difficult to handle horses and difficult to handle ponies, horses can also be ridden by adults to supplement the and correct the riding done by children. It is difficult to impossible to correct developing bad undersaddle habits in a child's pony.

Reins

Rein management can be difficult. The two most important aspects of it for children are to not drop the reins, and to hold them at an equidistant point to each side. Marking the proper point to hold the reins at a child's arm length electrical tape or rawhide string is helpful. Loop reins or tied split reins can prevent the hazard of dropping the reins to the ground. In either case, the loop should be long enough to allow slack in the reins whenever not stopping, backing, or turning the horse while also being short enough to require the child to hold the reins in front of

the horn. Otherwise, the child's hand may get squashed by the reins if the horse lowers its head and the child's hand is caught between the reins and the horn.

Helmet

Children are top heavy and built for falls, but not off of horses. A child's head must be protected by a helmet when riding and on the ground if near a horse. Bicycle helmets are not only inadequate for horse riding, they are dangerous for a fall off a horse just due to their shape.

Equestrian helmets are not effective if they do not fit properly. Adult helmets will not fit a child. A child's equestrian helmet should be adjusted so that if you rock it back and forth, the child's eyebrows should move. The V straps on the side should lie just under the earlobes. The throat strap should be loose enough to be reasonably comfortable for the child.

ATTIRE

Jewelry

No dangling jewelry should be worn, including wrist bracelets, ankle bracelets, earrings, or necklaces. Medical bracelets can be worn if they have a breakaway link.

Shirts

Shirts should fit well enough to reduce the risk of catching on objects. Long sleeves help protect against sunburn and flybites. Button snaps are safer than common buttons or zippers.

Pants

Denim full length pants are durable and preferred for children's riding. Shorts or exercise tights should never be worn to ride horses. Pants should not be baggy but the legs should be large enough to fit over the shaft of the child's boots. There should be no holes in the pants or bling on hip pockets.

Boots

Children should never be in the saddle or on the ground around horses without boots on. The boots should be slightly large so that the foot easily slips out. Western riding boots should never be lace up due to the risk of hang up in the stirrups. The soles should be smooth and the heels at least 1 inch high.

Children can benefit in many ways by being around horses. They can learn discipline, responsibility, leadership, empathy, how to take directions, courage, and self-confidence. On the other hand, horses can be dangerous if not handled correctly or in flight mood for any reason. Proper attire and tack are important aspects of mitigating the inherent dangers of riding horses.

If you have comments or you're interested in particular animal handling subjects contact us at CBC@BetterAnimalHandling.com

Now let's recap the key points to remember from today's episode:

- 1. Children need youth-sized, roughout, western saddles to begin learning to ride horses.**
- 2. In addition to a child's equestrian helmet, children who ride horses should wear denim full length pants, long-sleeved shirt, and western boots with at least a 1 inch heel.**

More information on animal handling can be found in my book, *Animal Handling and Physical Restraint*, published by CRC Press and available on Amazon and from many other fine book supply sources. My new spiral-bound handbook, *Concise Textbook of Small Animal Handling* was recently published and available from all major science book supply sources.

Additional information is provided at: www.betteranimalhandling.com . This website has more than 150 past podcasts with notes on handling of dogs, cats, other small mammals, birds, reptiles, horses, cattle, small ruminants, swine, and poultry.

Don't forget, serious injury or death can result from handling and restraining some animals. Safe and effective handling and restraint requires experience and continual practice. Acquisition of the needed skills should be under the supervision of an experienced animal handler.