

## Capture and Restraint of Foals

Our topics for this week are:

- **Capturing foals**
- **Restraining foals standing and in lateral recumbency**
- **Trailing foals**

Halters should only be put on foals and weanlings when they are tended to. Halters should not be left on a horse in a pen or pasture because they can catch it on objects, leading to injury to the horse, and sometimes death. Foals, weanlings, and yearlings like to scratch their heads with a hind foot and may catch their foot in a halter or they will box with each other and can catch a foot in another's halter. Leather or webbed halters will also lead to skin problems if left on for days in warm weather. Twitches should never be used on a foal due to the risk of inflicting pain and injury.

Capture of a nursing foal requires two handlers. It is imperative to catch and control a nursing mare before attempting to capture its foal. After catching the mare, it should be backed into a flat paneled corner that is strongly built. The handler of the mare should position the mare so that the foal can go between the mare and the wall to hide its face but not escape behind her. The foal handler should NOT try to pet the foal prior to getting it restrained. After the mare is restrained and quiet, the foal handler should move at normal walking speed toward the foal and confine the foal with an arm in front of its chest and the other arm behind its rump. Whenever walking behind a foal, the handler should keep his side toward it to protect his abdomen and kneecaps from a kick. The tail should not be held if possible, since some foals will sit down when their tail is held.

A foal should never be held just around its neck. It will rapidly back up and either escape or cause injury. The handler should hold the foal as lightly as possible, and position it so that the foal is next to the mare in nursing position. The handler should never be between the foal and mare. The handler's arms should be used as barrier to excessive movement and not squeeze the foal. When holding a foal, the handler should turn his head toward its rump to protect the handler's face in case the foal struggles and rears suddenly. A gate should not be used as a squeeze panel for restraint on foals or small horses if the gate does not have a solid panel on the lower half. A foal could easily get a foot or leg caught in a gate used as a squeeze panel.

Large foals may need to be held by two people. The front handler holds under the neck with a knee behind the foal's elbow and the back handler stands on the same side as the front handler and holds the base of the tail with a knee in its flank. The foal should not be lifted off its feet as this will add to fear and struggling.

If needed, a small foal can be laid down on its side by a handler standing by its side, bending its head away from the handler and toward its withers. The outside flank should be grasped and the foal gently slid down the handler's legs. Large foals or weanlings should be chemically restrained for lateral restraint.

Lateral restraint can be maintained by a handler squatting with knee pressure on the foal's neck and reaching between the hind legs and pulling the tail through the hind legs and holding it. Placing a towel over its head and humming to it will increase its relaxation while down.

If mares with nursing foals must be restrained in stocks, the stock should have a small pen attached to the front of the stocks, so the mare and foal can be face to face until the mare can rejoin the foal.

When trailering a foal, foals or other horses that have not been halter-broke should not be tied. The untied horse should be blocked off with a divider or gate and a trained and seasoned horse tied in the back of the trailer.

Nursing foals should always travel with their dam. If other horses will travel with mare and foal, the mare and foal should be in a compartment separated from other horses.

Trailer stall dividers should not go to the floor so an adult horse has more room to balance itself. However, if there is a possibility of a foal going under or being thrown underneath a divider, the bottom of the divider should be blocked.

If you have comments or you're interested in particular animal handling subjects contact us at [CBC@BetterAnimalHandling.com](mailto:CBC@BetterAnimalHandling.com)

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

- 1. Use two handlers and always catch and calm the nursing mare before attempting to capture her foal.**
- 2. To restrain a standing foal, its movements should be blocked but the foal should not be held firmly or squeezed.**
- 3. If a gate or panel is used to capture a foal, the lower aspect should be solid to keep it from getting a leg caught.**

More information on animal handling can be found in my recent books, *Animal Handling and Physical Restraint*, *Concise Textbook of Small Animal Handling*, and *Concise Textbook of Large Animal Handling* all published by CRC Press and available on Amazon and from many other fine book supply sources.

Additional information is provided at: [www.betteranimalhandling.com](http://www.betteranimalhandling.com) . This website has more than 200 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.