

Some Dangerous Habits of Horse Handlers and Riders: Part I

Dangerous habits of horse handlers and riders seems at times an endless list. This week we will cover some of the dangerous habits in horse stables.

Bad Habit #1: Feeding treats from your hand.

Treats are fine if presented to a horse in a feed bin or bucket. Feeding out of your hand or frequently rubbing their nose teaches them to be mouthy, nippy, and pushy, invading your personal space and becoming dangerous. Affection or praise is best delivered as rubs or gentle pats of the neck or forehead.

Bad Habit #2: Entering a stall with the horse's rump toward the stall door.

A horse that fails to face the door when you enter its stall is disrespectful and could be dangerous. Horses should instinctively face the door when it is opened or be trained to do so. Remember do not use hand delivered treats.

Bad Habit #3: Trying to apply a halter without a lead rope around the horse's neck.

Before attempting to put a halter on a horse, a handler should be able to control its body, particularly its hindquarters. When approaching a loose horse, the first action after petting it is to put a lead rope around its neck and then move its body using the lead rope to the best position to apply the halter.

Bad Habit #4: Allowing a horse in a stall to get between you and the stall door.

It can be tempting while in a stall with a horse to go around it or use a manure fork to clean a back corner but neither should be attempted. This would position the loose horse between you and the stall door. A bird could flutter, a vehicle could backfire, a horse could kick in the next stall, or many other things could startle the horse in your stall. If you are knocked down in the back of the stall, you could be trampled.

Bad Habit #5: Improperly tying a horse with a lead rope.

Tying a horse to an object that cannot withstand a 1200 lb horse pulling on it is dangerous. Tying a lead rope below the height of the horse's withers could injure its neck if it pulled back. Tying with too little distance to move or too much distance to move can cause a catastrophe. Horses should be tied about an adult handler's arm's length from a hitching point. Knowing how to tie a proper quick release hitch is essential for all horse handlers.

Bad Habit #6: Ducking under a tied lead rope.

Horses cannot see under their jaw. If you duck under its jaw or neck while it is tied, many horses will be startled by you disappearing and then suddenly popping up on the other side of its body. As a result, it will pull back and then jump forward into or onto you.

Bad Habit #7: Improperly tying a horse with crossties.

Crossties eliminate the temptation of ducking under a lead rope to groom a horse. However, they can be dangerous if the horse pulls back on them or jumps forward. If tied without a release, the horse can be thrown down. If tied with breakaways on the walls, a horse escaping from crossties can sling the crosstie ropes and hardware at themselves or any person or animal nearby. Horses should be trained for crossties, breakaway strings should be used at the halter attachments, and crosstie areas should be in a low to no traffic area in the stable.

Bad Habit #8: Kneeling or sitting on the ground near a horse.

All horses instinctively jump if startled. They do not care which way they jump when scared. Therefore, when working with a horse, especially on their legs or feet, you must be capable of immediately jumping out of their way at all times. Horse handlers should never work near a horse while sitting down on the ground or on step stools. Kneeling with both knees on the ground should not be done. Proper positions to work on horses legs or feet are to bend at the waist or kneel on just one knee.

Bad Habit #9: Holding a horse from the opposite side of a horse where a veterinarian or farrier is working on it.

If a horse is startled while being held by a halter and lead rope, it will swing its hindquarters away from the handler. If a veterinarian or farrier is working on the other side of the horse, its hindquarters will move into the veterinarian or farrier, possibly stepping on or knocking them down. The handler should always stand on the same side of a horse that someone who is working near the horse's hindquarters is on.

Bad Habit #10: Always walking a horse from its left side.

If you always walk a horse from its left side, when it is startled it will always swing its hindquarters to the right. This can be dangerous if there are other animals or people near its right side. A horse handler must anticipate dangerous situations when walking a horse. When approaching people, animals, or things that must be near the other side of the horse, the handler should always position himself between the horse and a nearby potential hazard.

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. Horse handlers need to anticipate the possibility of a horse becoming startled at any time and jumping aimlessly.**
- 2. A handler holding a horse's lead rope must position himself to protect others near the horse.**
- 3. While in a stall with a loose horse, a handler must position the horse and himself to be able to control the horse and have easy access to escape, if needed.**

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 . 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.