

The Horse Manual:
An Introduction to Horses for Volunteers

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Acknowledgment

I would like to thank my Technical Advisor, Marjorie Gilmore, for her expert help and guidance with this project. She has taught me a lot about horses, not just about them, but how to truly care for them and the incredible bond they allow us to share with them.

I hope that this manual teaches someone else what I have learned through working with horses: though they may be large and a bit intimidating at first, they can become your best friend and change your life. Take that risk, it's worth it!

~Elisha Procenti

Introduction:

Thank you for choosing to volunteer at Well Child Association. We could not function without the help of dedicated volunteers like yourself. Well Child Association was founded out of love by Marjorie Gilmore. She firmly believes that horses hold the key to helping many people from many backgrounds. Well Child Association is in its fifth year of operation. Through you and others like you, we continue to help those in need through horses.

Because volunteers will spend a lot of time around horses, though not always working directly with them, it is important to understand how horses behave and how to work safely with or around them.

The Horse Manual is a comprehensive guide to horses generated to help Well Child Association volunteers feel more comfortable around horses. Through the Volunteer Orientation, you got acquainted with the types of skills you will need when working with or around horses. If these skills seemed intimidating or caused some anxiety, please continue reading. This manual will give your confidence a boost!

This manual will begin by discussing horses as a species. It will then describe barn, safety, and equipment procedures. If there are any questions regarding terms used, a glossary is provided. Glossary words are identified by **bold** and an asterisk.

If you are not comfortable carrying out any of the procedures described here, do not hesitate to ask for help or have someone demonstrate them for you.

If you have further questions about the information presented in this manual or from the volunteer orientation session, do not hesitate to ask a more experienced volunteer or email Marjorie Gilmore, Founder/Director of Well Child Association at Jeanie5151@aol.com. She may also be reached at (309) 378-2124.

A Lesson in Horse Psychology

Horses are herd animals. In the wild, their survival depends upon the members in their particular herd. When domesticated, horses use a similar herd structure called a **hierarchy***. A hierarchy of horses usually has a dominate mare and stallion, followed by the other horses. Horses gain “respect” for each other through fighting. Any time a new horse is introduced to the herd, new fights break out to establish the new horse’s rank.

As volunteers it is important to take note of new horses at the barn and see how the horse reacts to those around him. If you see horses fighting, make sure you tell either the instructor or another volunteer if you do not feel comfortable separating them.

An important indicator when it comes to judging how a horse feels towards another horse, or even a human, is to watch his ears. If a horse’s ears are straight up or forward on his head, he is alert and friendly. If his ears are a bit back, exercise some caution when around him. If the horse has his ears flat back against his head, he is angry. It is best in this situation to get someone who is confident around horses, if you are not, to handle him.

Knowing how horses form their herds is important for anyone working with them. The head of a herd is generally known as the Alpha member. When a human works with a horse, they take on the Alpha role. When a horse misbehaves in the wild, he is punished usually by a bite or kick. It is the same here as in the wild where they would fight with another horse to gain respect; however, they are challenging us for respect. If a horse is allowed to disrespect us, he will become unmanageable. Instead, the horse should *a/ways* respect us. If a horse misbehaves, ask the instructor to demonstrate the correct way to curb the horse’s behavior.

In a way, horses are like children. When we give a horse an inch, he will try to get a foot. A horse that does not respect humans is dangerous. Because a human cannot compete with a horse’s size or strength, a horse can hurt us easily. We gain a working relationship with the horse by him respecting us as his leader. A horse will show that we are the leader by listening to us or obeying our wishes. When a human and horse work successfully together, they function as a team. Each member respects and listens to the other. Feel free to reward a horse for a job well done. You may pet the horse on his neck or

shoulder; however, do not reach for a horse's nose. It could startle him.

How we act around horses is equally as important as how horses act around humans. We often act shy around horses because their size intimidates us. The message this says to the horse is that he can boss us around. Posture has a lot to do with the level of respect a horse will give you. We should always walk tall and boldly around horses.

When an alpha horse approaches a lower-ranked horse, he does so with his head held high and with a confident stride. We must do the same thing. Do not cower down when approaching a horse, but hold your chest high. Walk with a powerful stride. Let the horse know you are there. The horses you will work with are gentle; as therapeutic mounts they have to be. You do not have to fear them, yet you do have to act confident around them.

Horses are also great emotion readers. They know whether you have had a bad day or are nervous. When you work with horses, try to clear your mind. Think of what you are doing with the horse and not about what is on your mind. Clearing your mind will not only make the horse easier to work with, but will also prevent loss of concentration accidents.

Horses, though large and powerful, do not have to be feared if you know how to work with them properly. After reading this section of the manual you should know more about how a horse relates to other horses, as well as how they relate to humans. As you continue to read this manual, you will learn procedures for working with or around horses. With this background and procedural knowledge, you will gain confidence and the skills necessary for even the most nervous person to enjoy working or being around horses.

Volunteer Guidelines

These procedures are for the comfort and protection of our volunteers. We ask that these procedures are followed at all times.

1. The most important procedure to follow is: **NO SMOKING**. Barns contain a lot of hay, straw, and other flammable objects. If you need to extinguish a cigarette, never do so in close proximity to the barn. Blowing ash could potentially cause a fire. If caught smoking in/or too close to the barn, you will not be allowed to volunteer.
2. If the weather is inclement, do not assume that no session will be held. If you have any questions regarding session cancellations, please contact Marjorie at (309) 378-2124. If there is an emergency and you cannot make a session, please call the Volunteer Coordinator, Margaret Kelly, at (309) 829-0455. Please give at least a **48-hour** notice, except in an extreme emergency.
3. Remember you will be working in a dusty, sometimes dirty environment. Please dress accordingly. Dress for both the weather and the environment. Non-slip shoes and pants are required no matter what weather conditions are present. If the weather is nice, we will be utilizing the outdoor arena. Both the horses and riders enjoy a change of scenery and being outdoors. Loose clothing, jewelry, sandals, and shorts are not appropriate for working in the barn.
4. Please keep a professional demeanor at all times. Rudeness is not tolerated.
5. To be early (5-10 minutes) is to be on time and to be on time, is to be late. Please remember to be on time!! Horses require some prep work before a session. Sessions must start on time, especially if there are two back to back.

Safety Around Horses

Safety is very important when working with horses. Because horses are so much larger and more powerful than us, some care must be taken to avoid injury or accidents around them.

The procedures covered in this section are:

1. How to safely take a horse out of his stall
2. How to safely lead a horse
3. How to safely tie a horse
4. How to safely groom a horse
5. How to safely tack a horse
6. How to safely mount a horse
7. How to safely dismount a horse
8. How to safely un-tack a horse

* Cleaning hooves will not be covered in this manual. A horse's feet do need cleaning prior to activity; however, an experienced staff member will instruct you how to clean a horse's hooves.

1. How to Safely Take a Horse Out of His Stall

Horses should never have their halters on while in a stall. Horses must have a halter and lead rope on once they are out of their stall. This prevents any accidental escapes.

* Equipment needed: **halter*** and **lead rope***

Caution:

- *Always watch the horse's ears before and while you are removing the horse. If they are forward or up straight, the horse is happy, if they pinned back on his head, he is angry.*

1. Know which horse is needed.
2. Open the stall door all the way.
3. While standing on horse's left, slip the halter over his muzzle and around his ears.
4. Buckle the halter using the strap around his head and throat. **DO NOT** tighten all the way.
5. Lead the horse from his left side out of the stall. Do not let the horse exit the stall before you. Keep him under your control. **DO NOT** stand in front of him, as he could startle and knock you over.

2. How to Safely Lead a Horse

*Horses must be lead with a halter and lead rope: **always**. Anytime the horse is out of his stall, he must be with a handler or tied securely, unless a capable rider has him under their control.*

* Equipment needed: **halter***and **lead rope***

Caution:

- *Always* lead a horse from his left side as that is how all horses are taught.
- *Always* stand beside the horse's shoulder so that you can see his ears.
- If a horse rears or balks while he is being led, do not pull against him as you get hurt. Move with him.

1. When horse is tied, untie and then continue the steps.
2. If horse has lead rope and halter on, continue with steps.
3. Untie or take the horse under your control.
4. Stand to the left of the horse.
5. Grab the lead rope with your right hand 6-8 inches under his head.
6. Take the slack of the lead rope in your left hand. **DO NOT** loop the excess rope around your hand. If the horse pulls, it could break your hand.
7. Lead the horse where he is needed at a comfortable walking pace.

3. How to Safely Tie a Horse

A horse must be tied securely if he is without the immediate control of a handler.

* Equipment needed: **halter*** and **lead rope***, or **halter*** and **cross ties***

1. Lead the horse to the tying area.
2. If the **cross ties*** are available, secure horse by snapping one on each side of the halter.
3. If no cross ties are available, you must tie the horse to the **wash rack***. The wash rack is located in the entrance area in the barn.
4. Tie the lead rope to the bar by using a half-bow knot. (like a half tied shoe bow)
5. Tie the rope with enough slack so that the horse can move his head, yet not so loose that it is dragging on the floor.
6. The rope should never be tied in such a way that the horse could not pull free in an emergency.

4. How to Safely Groom a Horse

Grooming horses is an important part of getting them ready for a session. Not only does it clean the horse, but it makes the horse feel more relaxed.

* Equipment needed: **curry comb***, **body brush***, **face brush***

Caution:

- Never approach a horse from the rear. Approach the horse at an angle so he can see you. If you must move around the back of the horse, speak to him and place your hand on his body as you move around him.
- *Always* walk around a tied horse. *Never* walk over or under the ropes tying him. A horse has a “blind spot” directly in front of him and can not see you.
- *Do Not* let lead ropes dangle on the ground as a horse or human could trip on them.

1. Pick up the curry comb. The curry comb is used to raise deep dirt and hair in the horse's coat.
2. Brush the horse's body in 5-7 inch circles, starting at his shoulder moving towards his rear. Do not use curry comb on legs, face, or underneath his belly.
3. After currying, pick up the body brush. This brush has stiff bristles and is used to remove the dirt that the curry raises.
4. Brush the horse in long, even strokes going from shoulder to rear. You may use the body brush lightly on the horse's underside and legs. Do not use the body brush on his face.
5. After brushing most of the curried dirt off, pick up the face brush. This brush has softer bristles and is used primarily on the horses face; however, it is also used to get the fine dirt off the horse's coat.
6. Start gently with the horse's neck (under his mane) and brush towards his rear using long, smooth strokes.
7. Check over your work to make sure the horse is brushed evenly on both sides and under his belly.

5. How to Safely Tack a Horse

Tacking horses is putting on whatever equipment will be needed for a session. This equipment varies from client to client. The instructor will notify you what equipment will be used with what horse.

*Equipment needed: various **tack***

Caution:

- The horse should *a/ways* be saddled and bridled, then tied outside of his stall prior to tacking up to. A horse can pin you if he is tacked in a tight space.
- Each rider and horse require specific tack. All tack assignments will be given by the instructor prior to tacking.

1. Go into the Tack Room and grab the needed tack. Bridles are paired with the horse's name above them. Saddles are rider specific and numbered. Make sure you know which horse you need tack for and what kind of saddle is needed. Also, make sure you use an appropriate saddle pad for both the saddle and horse. Again, the Instructor or another volunteer will be able to help you.
2. Approach the horse with tack from the left side. Set the tack down out of the horse's reach. Always saddle a horse first. If you bridle the horse first, you will not be able to tie him.

Saddling:

1. Before placing the saddle on the horse's back, lift the right stirrup over the top of the saddle. This will eliminate the stirrup hitting the horse in the side and startling him.
2. Place the saddle pad gently over the horse's back. Make sure it covers about half of his **withers***, and is evenly placed over the horse's spine.
3. Gently place the saddle on the horse's back. Again, make sure it is centered and is neither too far back, nor too far forward.
4. Now that the saddle is in place, the **girth*** needs to be tightened. The girth is the strap under the horse's belly. Crouching down by the horse's left side you will see the girth strap on the right side of the horse's belly. Grab the girth and pull it over towards you.

5. Pull the strap through the buckle on the girth. Tighten snugly, but not so tight that the horse is uncomfortable standing around. If you do not feel comfortable with the tightness of the girth, ask someone to check it for you. If the girth is too loose, the saddle could slip causing the rider to fall off. **ALWAYS** check the girth again before mounting a rider in the arena.

Bridling:

Caution: Horse may try to put his head up to avoid bridling. If you have trouble bridling him, ask another volunteer for help.

1. Take the halter off the horse's face and re-buckle around the horse's neck. This way the horse is never untied.
2. Take the top of the bridle in your right hand and the **bit*** of the bridle in your left.
3. Gently use your fingers to apply pressure at the corner of the horse's mouth so that he knows to open his mouth for the bit.
4. With his mouth open, slide the bit in. Be careful not to put your fingers in the horse's mouth. If you are not comfortable bridling the horse, please ask another volunteer for help.
5. With the bit in his mouth, continue to put the rest of the bridle on. The top part goes over his ears. The band towards the bit goes around his nose.
6. The buckle towards the horse's throat or **throat latch*** gets buckled first. This buckle does not have to be tightened down all the way.
7. The nose buckle or **nose band*** needs to be buckled so that two fingers can fit on top of each other between the leather and the horse's skin.
8. Pull the **reins*** over the horse's head.
 9. Remove the halter.
 10. The horse is now completely tacked up.

6. Mounting a Horse

Mounting a horse may be done either from the ground or ramp depending on the rider. This procedure requires two volunteers: one to lead the horse and a helper volunteer to assist the rider.

Before the rider is mounted on the horse, the saddle **MUST** be checked to see if it loosened up. Failure to do this could result in the rider slipping off.

Mounting From the Ground With **Mounting Block***:

1. Lead the horse into the arena. While the horse is being led in, the helper volunteer *must* make sure the arena gate is closed after the rider has entered the arena.
2. Make the horse stop and stand still. The leader must stand in front of horse to keep horse from walking forward.
3. The other volunteer will position the mounting block on left side of horse.
4. The other volunteer will help the rider onto the mounting block.^
5. The other volunteer will help the rider put left foot into left stirrup.^
6. The other volunteer will help the rider swing right foot over horse and find the stirrup on right side of horse.^
7. Make sure rider is seated well. Wait for instruction from NARHA certified instructor before moving the horse and rider.
8. Have the rider cue the horse forward.

Mounting From the **Ramp***:

1. Lead the horse to the ramp.
2. Stop the horse making sure to stand in front of him.
3. The rider mounts the horse either by being placed on horse by other volunteer, or being assisted out of a wheel chair by other volunteer.
4. Once rider is seated and has feet in both stirrups, the leader may lead the horse from the ramp, after NARHA certified Instructor gives the okay.

^Not all riders will need help. Always ask before assuming that the rider will need help.

7. Dismounting

*The rider always dismounts to the ground, not to the **mounting block*** or **ramp***. Dismounts require two volunteers: one to hold the horse and one to help the rider.*

The leader *must* stay with the horse until the rider and helper volunteer have left the arena.

1. Leader must stand in front of horse to ensure he will not move forward.
2. The helper volunteer holds the rider around their hips and carefully slides them off of the horse and to the ground, or wheel chair. *Heavier riders may require a third volunteer to help with dismount.
3. After the helper volunteer(s) and rider have left the arena, the leader may lead the horse out of the arena.

8. How to Safely Un-tack a Horse

Horses must be un-tacked completely after being ridden.

*Equipment needed: **halter*** and **lead rope***

1. Grab a halter and lead rope.
2. First remove the bridle. The bridle must be unbuckled and taken completely off so that the halter can be put on. The horse needs the halter on so that he can be tied.
3. Remove the saddle. Unbuckle the girth and remove the saddle being careful not to drag it over the horse's back.
4. Remove the saddle pad.
5. Put away the tack where it was taken from.
6. Re-groom the horse using the same method as before he was ridden. Also have someone clean out the horse's hooves if you do not know how to do so.
7. After grooming, lead the horse to his stall and remove the halter and lead rope.

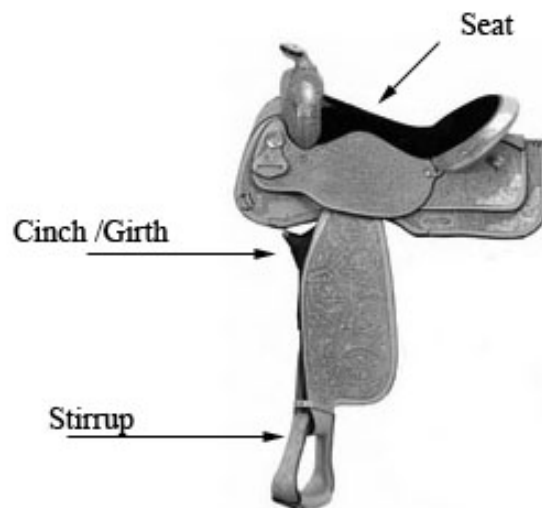
Guide To Tack

Tack is another word for any equipment used on horses. Horse tack is often classified into saddles and bridles, yet there are many other kinds of tack used on horses. There are also many types of saddles and bridles.

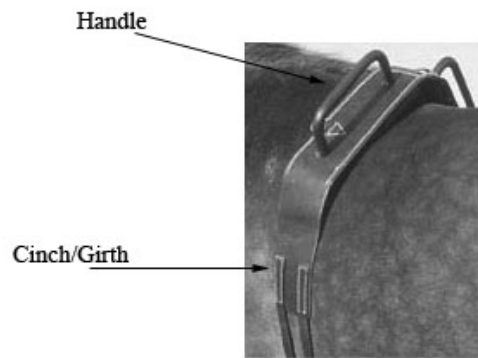
Well Child Association uses a standard **Western saddle*** or a **surcingle*** for its sessions depending on the client and their needs.

The bridle used depends on the horse. Sometimes a halter and lead rope are used. If the rider can ride semi-independently or independently, a regular bridle and **reins*** are used.

Western saddle:



Surcingle:



Bridle:



Glossary

Bit: The bit rests on a flat area in the horse's mouth. The rider uses the reins and bridle to apply pressure to the bit which tells the horse to move. By applying more pressure to the bit, it tells the horse to slow down. Bits are made out of various types of metal.

Bridle: The bridle is used to control the horse by moving the bit in the horse's mouth, thus controlling the horse's speed. The bridle also allows the rider to steer the horse by turning his head.

Body Brush: This is a stiff brush used to groom a horse after currying. It removes dead hair and dirt easily.

Cross Ties: Cross ties look like long extended lead ropes. They fasten on each side of the halter and are connected to either a beam or other sturdy structure in the barn. They keep the horse tied securely.

Curry Comb: This usually circular, metal or plastic comb is used to get difficult to remove dead hair and dirt out of the horse's coat. When used in a circular motion, it cleans down to the root of the coat.

Face Brush: The face brush is a soft brush meant to use on the horse's face and other delicate body parts such as the legs and belly.

Girth/Cinch: The girth or cinch is used to fasten the saddle around the horse. It can be made out of leather or cotton rope. If it is not fastened tight enough, the rider can slide off.

Halter: A halter serves the same purpose as a bridle to control the horse, though it does not have a bit. A horse is not typically ridden in a halter because the rider cannot control the horse as well. Halters are mainly used to lead or tie a horse.

Hierarchy: The hierarchy is the herd structure of a herd of horses. The highest rank in the herd is usually a stallion or mare, followed by the other horses. Horses determine their herd order by fighting each other.

Lead Rope: The lead rope is used to lead a horse or ties a horse. It is usually made out of cotton or some other rope-like material.

Mounting Block: A plastic stair that makes it easier for shorter rider to get on horses.

Nose Band: This is the part of the bridle that buckles around the horse's nose. It is located right above the bit.

Ramp: This is a wooden ramp similar to a wheel chair ramp used to help riders with limited mobility mount a horse.

Reins: Reins are connected to the bit and allow the rider to steer the horse. If pulled back, they tell the horse to slow down.

Saddle Pad: The saddle pad fits underneath the saddle. The saddle pad should be roughly the same size as the saddle it is being used with. Some horses require thinner or thicker saddle pads than others.

Stirrup: The part of the saddle that the rider places their feet in.

Surcingle: The surcingle is like a saddle; however, it does not have a seat. The rider holds onto the handles for balance. It is used mainly in leading sessions where the rider does not have control over the horse.

Tack: The term tack refers to any piece of equipment used on the horse. Tack consists mainly of saddles and bridles, but can also include blankets and other specialized training equipment.

Throat Latch: This is the part of the bridle that goes under the horse's head and fastens underneath his throat.

Wash Rack: The wash rack is an indoor place to bathe horses. It has large metal pipes that work well to tie horses to.
*Not all wash racks can withstand horses being tied to them.

Western Saddle: The Western saddle has a horn. That is its distinguishing factor. Western saddles work well with young or non-independent rider because they can hang onto the horn if they become uncomfortable. Western

saddles are also large and give the rider a more secure seat.

Wither: The withers is the part of the horse at the base of his neck that curves slightly up like an arc. The saddle pad and saddle should fit about halfway over the withers.