

STRIDES TRAINING

Understanding Horse
Behavior: Equine Senses



When working with horses,
[communication is key.](#)

Beginning a process of understanding horse senses, instincts and implications are a step in predicting behaviors, managing risks and increasing positive relationships.

Equine Senses



Smell

The horse's sense of smell allows him to recognize other horses and people. Smell also enables the horse to evaluate situations.



Implication #1

Horses should be allowed the opportunity to become familiar with new objects and their environment by smelling.



Implication #2

Treats should not be carried in pockets since horses may desire to go after them.



Implication #3

There should be no food in the riding arena.

Hearing

The horse's sense of hearing is also very acute. Horses may combine their senses of hearing and sight to become more familiar with new or alerting sounds.



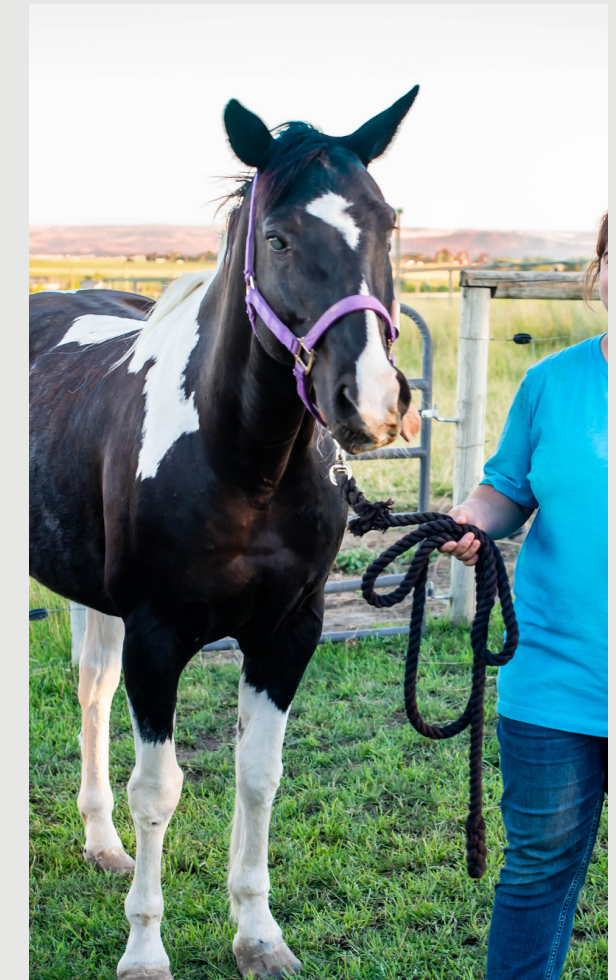
Implication #1

Horses are wary when they hear something but do not see it which can cause the fright/fight response.



Implication #2

If the horse is acting nervous, talk to him in a quiet and calm voice for reassurance.



Implication #3

Avoid shouting or using a loud voice. This can be frightening to a horse.

Hearing, pt2

Always be aware of the position of the horse's ears...



Implication #1

Ears flicking back and forth indicate attentiveness or interest.



Implication #2

Forward ears communicate attentiveness and interest.



Implication #3

Stiffly pricked ears indicate interest as well, however, the horse is on high alert and could progress to nervousness.

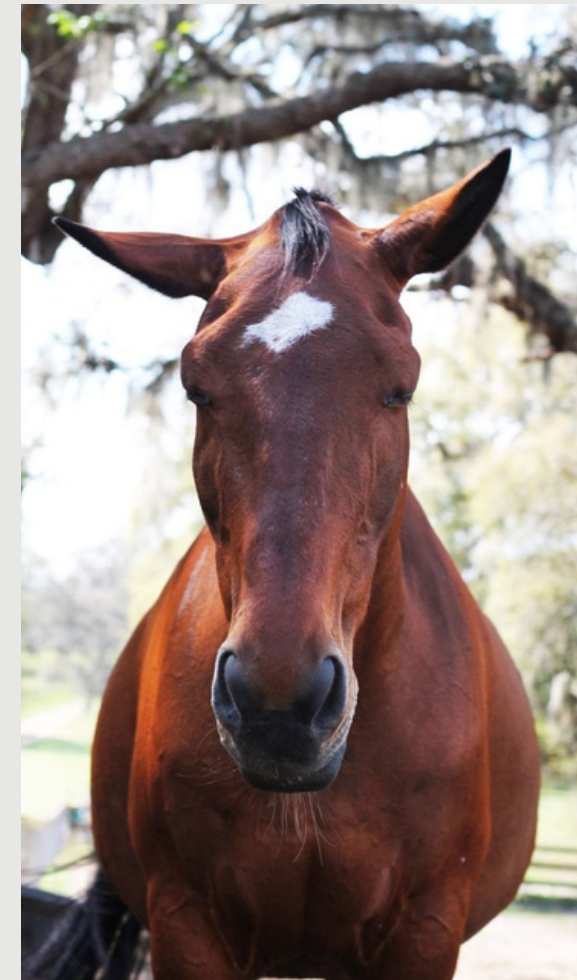
Hearing, pt3

Always be aware of the position of the horse's ears...



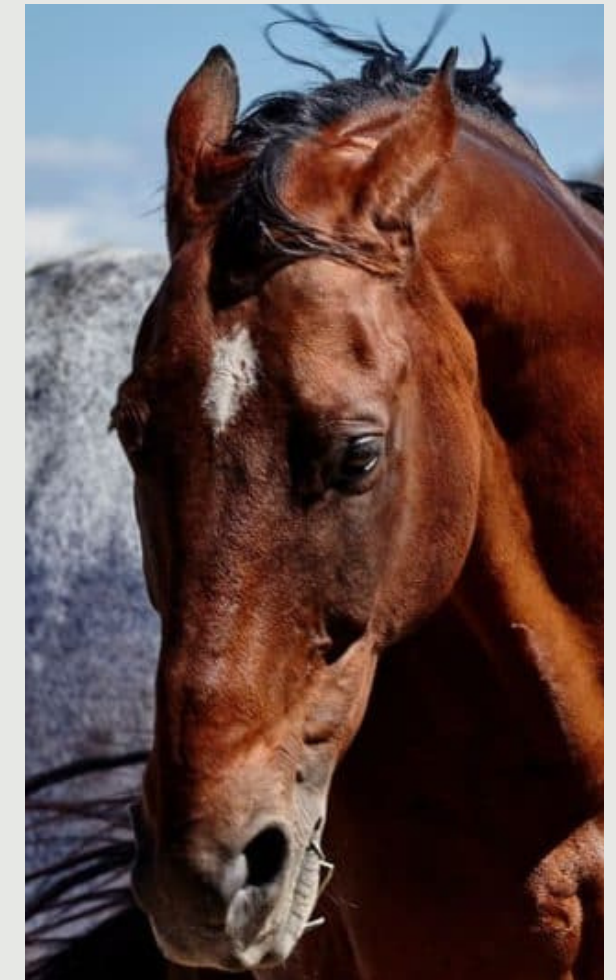
Implication #4

Ears that are laid back often communicate that the horse is upset and/or showing aggression toward another horse or towards a person.



Implication #5

Drooping ears indicate relaxation, inattentiveness (easily startled), exhaustion or illness.

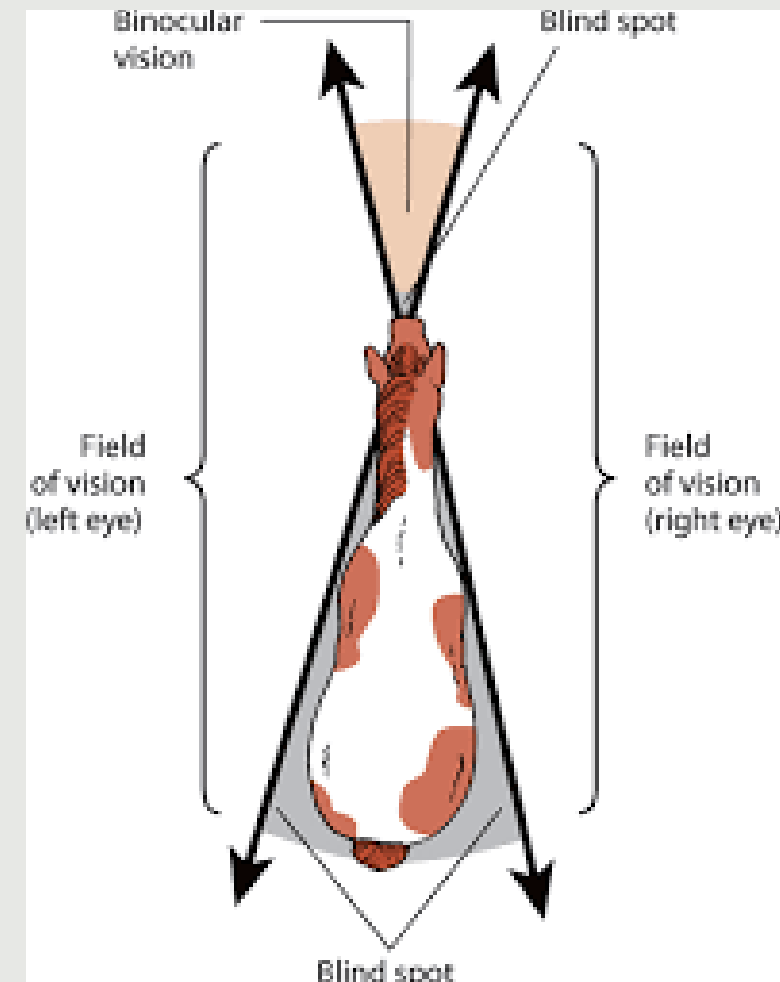


Implication #6

Flattened ears indicate anger, threat or fear. Typically, with tightened nostrils.

Sight

The horse's eyes are set on either side of the head. There is good peripheral (side) vision, but poor frontal vision.



Implication #1

The horse notices new / different items in arena / trail. Allow the horse an opportunity to look at new objects from both sides.
New props should be introduced before class.

Implication #2

The horse has two blind spots: directly in front of him and directly behind him. The best way to approach a horse is obliquely, toward his shoulder.

Implication #3

The horse may not see around his mouth. This is a safety consideration; therefore, **DO NOT HAND FEED STRIDES HORSES. ALWAYS PUT TREATS IN A BUCKET**

Touch

Touch is used as a communication between horses and between horses and people. Horses are sensitive to all types of touch.



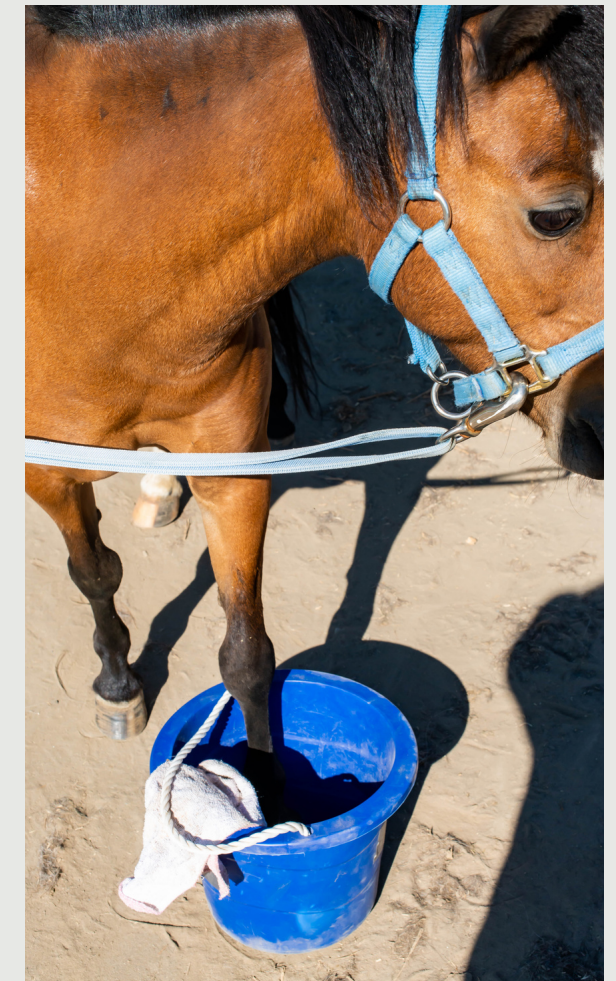
Implication #1

Handlers should touch horses gently but firmly.



Implication #2

Each horse has sensitive areas (e.g. the flank and belly areas). It is important to be familiar with them.



Implication #3

Horses may touch or paw at unfamiliar objects. For example, a horse may paw at a ground pole before crossing over it.



Taste

Taste is closely linked with the sense of smell and helps the horse to distinguish palatable foods and other objects.

Implication #1

A horse may lick or nibble while becoming familiar with objects or people. BE CAREFUL, as this could lead to possible biting.



The Horse's Instinct

It is a good idea to increase our appreciation and awareness of the horse's lifestyle. This will assist us in responding appropriately to the horse's reactions to various situations.

Flight or Fight

Horses are built for speed and would rather turn and run away from danger than face and fight it.

A

At a sudden movement or noise, a horse may try to flee. Speak to the horse calmly. Avoid sudden movements on or off the horse.

B

A frightened horse that is being tied up or held tightly may try to escape by pulling back against the pressure. Relax your hold or untie him quickly. Usually he will relax. Be sure not to stand directly behind a horse.

C

If flight is not possible, the horse may either try to kick or rear, especially in a tight area like a stall. Using a halter with a lead rope may help to maintain control while working around the horse in a stall.

If a horse appears frightened or fearful while on the trail, it may be helpful to allow a more experienced horse to lead the way.

Flight or Fight, pt2



Most horses chosen to work in an adaptive riding setting have less of an instinct to flee. The horse may look to you for reassurance. It is helpful for the volunteer to remain calm and talk to the horse in a soothing voice.



Herd Animals

Horses like to stay together in a herd or group with one or two dominant horses and a pecking order among the rest of the herd.

If one horse spooks at something, the surrounding horses may also be affected.

Herd Animals, pt2



Be aware that a horse may not like being alone. This is a consideration when horses are leaving the arena or a horse loses sight of the others while on a trail ride.

Be aware that if the horse in front is trotting or cantering, the horse that is following may also attempt to trot or canter.

Herd Animals, pt3



For safety, keep at least one horse length between horses when riding within a group to respect the horses' space and pecking order.



VOLUNTEER MANUAL

Today's learning module can be referenced in your volunteer manual.

Please complete the online quiz for your certificate.