

PONY CLUB



Pony Behaviour Mini Achievement Badge Workbook



Key points

- To recognize when a pony is angry, happy and sad
- To understand how ponies live in the wild as part of a herd
- To have knowledge of safety around a pony, eg where to stand, how to approach the pony and the reasons for this

This workbook is an introduction to the subject that it covers. As it is addressed primarily to young children, it is important that the instructor must be prepared to demonstrate the subject practically, and allow the member to practice the skills as frequently as required. It is highly recommended that the parent or the instructor read or explain the contents of the workbook to the child as it cannot be assumed that the child is able to read the information or instructions sufficiently well to achieve understanding.

Name

Branch

Ponies living in the wild

Herd animals

In order to understand why horses act as they do, we need to look at life from their point of view.

- They are herd animals; used to living as part of a group
- So, they feel safe with other horses, in familiar places
 - Taking a pony out on a hack, to a new place or into the arena may be scary for them (particularly if they are not with their friends)
 - Being asked to live on their own, in a field, is also scary and lonely for them. It is a little better if there is another pony in a field next door that they can see and even stand next to with just the fence between them



Prey animals

- Horses and ponies are not predators (like lions or bears or even us!). They do not hunt and kill their food. They are prey animals, which means lions would hunt them if they still lived in the wild!
- Being prey animals out in the wild, they have a **flight or fight reflex**
 - This means that most ponies run away from danger
 - At times they may fight back by biting or kicking but this would normally happen only if they can't get away by running
- Things that don't spook us do scare them
 - Some run away from anything unusual, and others may stop & stare and may refuse to move on. By looking, they are trying to work out if the unusual object is a danger to them. They might take a very long time to decide that it is safe
- Their sense of hearing, sight and smell is excellent

- In the wild these senses warn them of dangerous predators who may want to kill and eat them
- They are always alert to any warning signals
 - Horses may become even more sensitive and nervous in bad weather, when it is more difficult for them to see, smell or hear danger



These horses have seen something in the distance, to the right. They haven't decided yet if it is a danger. The lead mare will tell them when or if to run.

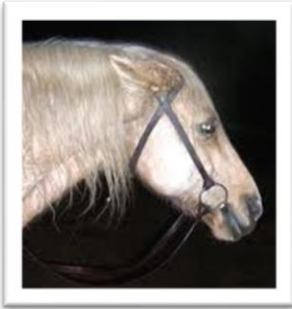


Herd hierarchy

- Horses live in herds that have a carefully worked out social structure
 - Each herd is led by a mare who is at the top of the 'pecking' order. This dominant mare is usually older and wiser. She is the one that controls the herd's eating, travelling and drinking. She also signals when she senses danger and it is time to flee
 - When living in herds, young horses and less experienced ones will learn from the dominant mare what to run away from and what they can safely ignore
 - In the herd the dominant mare rules because she is *trusted* to find food, shelter, water and keep the herd safe
- To gain a horse's respect we have to learn to portray these traits of the dominant mare – trust and wisdom!
- If there is a strong male in the herd, he will help to protect the herd by looking out for danger, but is not the leader when it is time for the herd to go for water or food, for eg.

Who do you think are the leaders in the pictures below?



A pony's feelings

| How are they feeling? | What do they look like? | How can we tell? |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Angry |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ears are back • Eyes are small • Nose is pinched • Teeth can be bared • Mouth is tight |
| Happy |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ears can be forward or floppy • Eyes are open and watching • Nose is relaxed • The horse is interested in what is going on around him |
| Sad |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eyes are sometimes closed, or smaller • Head is droopy and neck is low • Ears are not listening • He does not care about what is going on |

Safety around your pony

When you want to go and say hello to your pony in the field, how should you walk up to them?

- Wear closed shoes, your hard hat and gloves
- When fetching your pony from the field, take a halter and lead rein - and a friend if needed - with you
- Avoid taking food along, as this could cause a fight between ponies, when they all want to get some too
- Talk or call softly as you approach the ponies, so that they know that you are there

- Respect your pony's personal body space when catching him, by not approaching him in the blind spots directly in front or behind him
- Walk up to his head/shoulder and give him a moment to check you out (extend your hand, palm down with fingers curled under)
- This mimics another horse extending his nose in friendship or greeting
- When your horse puts his nose into your space, he is asking who is the leader, you or him
- If you step back when he does this, you are saying he is the leader; so try to stand still
- A medium, gentle, yet deliberate poke of a horse's nose on your hand indicates that he is saying "hello"



- However, if he moves his body into yours in an attempt to push you over, he is trying to be bossy, and the leader
- Once he is standing quietly, step to his left side and continue to talk quietly as you put on the halter
- Lead safely next to your pony's shoulder

Working with your horse/pony in the stable or paddock

- Take care to avoid taking your pony too close to the other ponies so that you don't get accidentally kicked by any of them
- Ensure the stable door is wide open before taking your pony inside. The space to walk through must be clear so that your pony doesn't hit their hips on the sides of the door
- Lead your pony in, turn around immediately (turning the pony too) and face the door
- Close the door before you let go of the lead rein to stop your pony from running out
- Stay away from his back legs to stay safe

Letting a pony go after you have finished riding

- Take his tack off in the paddock/ stable (remember to be safe when doing this. Choose a nice quiet area with no other horses if you don't have a stable). Keep hold of the pony's reins while you remove the saddle, and then take off the bridle
- Put on a halter and lead rein to replace the bridle
- Make sure the pony has cooled down. If not, you may need to lead him around quietly for a while until he is cool (has stopped sweating)
- Quietly lead the pony to its paddock/field
- You might need to take somebody to open the gate for you so that you can enter the field, especially if there are other ponies standing at the gate
- Once inside the gate, close it and turn the pony's head towards you before carefully removing the halter
- Step away quietly, and allow the pony to move off. Be careful he can't kick you in his excitement at being back in his paddock and with his friends



Learn to Be Safe

Spend some time, with your instructor, watching a group of ponies in the paddock. Watch their ears moving. Can you see which ponies are happy, which sad, or which are angry? Can you see how the angry pony chases other ponies away, by kicking, biting or threatening?

Now watch your instructor go in to the field to catch a pony. Then show her how you can catch a pony safely - try it a few times, catching a different pony each time.

The next time a group of your friends go for a ride, ask your instructor to watch you when you get back, while you each return your pony to the field. Does she think you have done it safely?