**Horse Safety Tips for Beginners**

Seeing a horse up close for the first time is a breathtaking experience.  Not only are they beautiful, but they’re also one of the largest creatures we get to interact with on a regular basis. Because they are so large and powerful, there are important safety tips that everyone should know before approaching or riding a horse. So, how can you stay safe around horses?

**Stay Alert**

One of the best horse safety tips is to stay alert when you’re around them. As you’re around horses more and more, you’ll be able to sense when something isn’t quite right. But even if you’re a beginner, your instincts can be a helpful indicator as to when a situation isn’t safe. If you feel like a situation isn’t safe, remove yourself from the situation and get the assistance of someone with more experience.

Avoid going near horses when your senses aren’t at 100 percent, either due to sleep deprivation, medication, or alcohol. When you’re in any of these states, you won’t be able to recognize or respond to potentially dangerous situations as well as you would otherwise.

Staying alert not only to the horse but also your surroundings will help you to see potential situations that your horse may react to. Whether its something that may cause your horse to spook, like a bag blowing in the breeze or a noisy truck coming down the road, or something that may distract your horse like lush grass or horses in a neighboring field, being alert to what’s going on around you will help you maintain control of your horse.

**Make Your Presence Known**

Horses are, by nature, flight animals. That means that they are instinctively ready to flee at any given time. If you’re not making your presence known and manage to surprise a horse, it could be potentially dangerous for you and the horse.

One of the worst things you can do to a horse is sneak up on it. Make your presence known by speaking in your regular tone as you approach. You should also make sure that the horse sees you coming. A horse that knows that you are approaching it is far less likely to kick, bite, or run away in fright.

As you spend time with your horse, they will become accustomed to your presence. But you should always make sure that they know it’s you coming, and not a rival horse trying to steal their favorite patch of grass!

**Avoid Danger Areas**

Many beginners are tentative around horses and pull away from a horse whenever there is any sign of danger. But what many don’t know is that the safest place to be is directly beside a horse’s front shoulder rather than a few feet away from them. Standing several feet away from a horse puts you in a good position for a full powered horse kick. When you stand just beside their front shoulder, they aren’t able to gather the same amount of momentum to carry out a powerful kick.

The worst possible places to stand near a horse are directly in front of it, where you can be trampled if they bolt forwards, or behind it, where they can easily deliver a powerful kick.

It’s good to note that horses actually have a blind spot directly in front of them. If you happen to be in that blind spot when they get spooked, it could be a bad situation. Horses also have a blind spot directly behind them, making approaching them from behind particularly dangerous. If you do ever need to cross behind a horse, the safest way to do so is to stay close to their body, keeping one hand on them as you move around so that they know where you’re located.

The rule to remember here is to always stand beside their front shoulder or far enough away that you’re out of reach for a kick.

**Approach the Horse from the Side**

The safest way to approach a horse is at an angle from the side where they can clearly see you. Because of the blind spots that horses have directly in front of them and behind them, avoid approaching from either of these angles. When you do so, they might not know you’re coming until the last second. Speak calmly as you approach to help ensure that they are well aware of your presence.

**Watch for Warning Signs**

Horses give warning signs when they’re about to do something unusual like kicking or biting. Knowing these signs will help you stay safe in otherwise hazardous situations. Horses kick or bite when they feel afraid or defensive. One of the clearest signs that a horse is upset is when they lay their ears flat on their head. This is known as pinning their ears. If a horse you’re around does this, exercise extreme caution as they might be about to kick or bite.

Other signs of an uncomfortable horse include rapidly swiveling ears, as though they are trying to listen to noises all around them, excessive tail swishing, and a slightly lowered head that is moved from side to side.

A great way to tell what a horse is feeling is to notice the expression in their eyes. If a horse is nervous, they’ll be wide-eyed. If a horse is calm and relaxed, their eyes will be half- closed and they may chew their teeth contently.

**Avoid Surprises**

While surprises might be fun for us, horses are a bit less fond of them. Things that we might not even think twice about can really startle a horse. A few examples are running, loud or strange noises, foreign objects like plastic bags, unexpected physical contact, things that resemble snakes, and the wind.

Like mentioned above, horses are creatures of flight. If they are surprised by something, they’ll naturally want to run away. If you don’t know how to handle a horse when they’re spooked or surprised, this could be a potentially dangerous situation.

Chances are, no matter how hard you try to avoid surprises, your horse is bound to run into them at one point or another. That said, it’s good to perform desensitization training to help them react properly in unexpected situations.

**Ask Permission Before Going Near Someone’s Horse**

You should always ask permission before approaching someone’s horse. For one, this is the polite thing to do. But secondly, you don’t know what condition the horse is in. If the horse is a rescue from an abusive situation, they might respond negatively to physical contact from anyone that they haven’t established trust with yet.

The horse could also be dealing with other physical or psychological issues that you’re not aware of. It’s always best to exercise caution by asking the horse’s owner before approaching.

**Stay Calm**

If you’ve heard anything about horses, you’ve likely heard that horses can pick up on your emotions when you’re around them, and this is certainly true.

Horses can sense when a beginner rider is in the saddle, and if that rider is tentative or fearful. Horses tend to mirror the emotions they pick up on, so if you’re nervous or anxious, the [horse may become nervous and anxious](https://equinehelper.com/signs-a-horse-is-stressed/). Likewise, if you’re frustrated, the horse will probably become frustrated. Staying calm and utilizing clear and definitive commands will help you stay safe and maintain control of your horse.

If you’re concerned that you won’t be calm around your horse, a good technique is to go slowly and take deep breaths. The more you ride, the more your confidence and abilities will improve.

If you’re feeding your horse something special out in the field, other horses will quickly take notice of it. If you’re not careful, you’ll quickly end up with an unwanted audience of hungry and pushy horses.

You should always take your horse out of the field when you are feeding them something special. They’ll be able to enjoy their treat in peace, and you won’t have to worry about being surrounded.

**Hold Your Lead Rope, Don’t Wrap It**

Whenever you’re leading your horse with a halter, you should never wrap or attach the lead rope to any part of your body. If the horse were to take off while you have the lead rope wrapped around your arm, this could result in you being dragged. This rule applies for any type of horse gear. If it’s attached to your horse, make sure that it’s not attached to you.

**Exercise Caution Around Ropes**

Ropes play an important role with horses, but they can also be dangerous in certain situations. If your horse is tied off, you should never step under or over the rope that is securing them. You should also be mindful of where and what you secure your horse to.

Securing them to something that isn’t secure could result in injury for the horse or anyone around them if they pull back suddenly against the rope and send the object flying. You should always make certain that whatever you tie them off to is secure. Another good safety precaution is to use a quick release knot whenever you tie them off so that they can easily be freed in an emergency.

**Stay Out of Tight Spaces**

Horses are incredibly strong. So strong that they can potentially injure you by accident by pressing you against the wall of a trailer, stall, riding ring, or any other immovable object. You should always avoid putting yourself between a horse and a hard place.

If you have to be in a stall with a horse, always make sure you are closer to the door. If you let the horse get in between you and the stall door, you may not be able to make a quick exit if you need to.

If you have to load a horse on a trailer, you can teach your horse to self-load, This means that they’ll walk onto the trailer without you having to lead them. If your horse doesn’t self-load, then always use caution and be aware of the location of escape doors.

**Close Gates Behind You**

An easy mistake to make is forgetting to close and secure gates all the way, but this is something that should be avoided at all costs. If a gate is left open, horses will be able to make their way to places that aren’t safe, like busy roads and neighborhoods. It’s good to form the habit of double checking that gates are securely closed whenever you’re entering or leaving an area.