

Confidence and the Young Horse

Building confidence in a young horse is easy if you consider (at all times) that Well of Experiences he is building.

Some guidelines to support his confidence, curiosity and acceptance are the following:

- Do not let others ride your horse.
- Set your horse up for success.
- Start every new session with him doing something he is familiar with and enjoys.
- End every session with something he is familiar with and enjoys.
- Warm him up before work; cool him down after work.
- How he FEELS is more important than how he LOOKS.
- Spend time with him that is not a part of “training” (although all time with him, he is either learning or un-learning).
- Be consistent (don't let him reach down and eat grass one day, then punish him for it the next day).
- Be clear (explain with patience and clarity what you expect from him).
- Be compassionate (imagine how he feels).



Be certain that you have covered his basics for survival and comfort:

- Water
- Food
- Salt
- Shelter
- Companionship

When schooling the horse (of any age) who will be ridden, “ponying” with a solid, calm horse can build confidence. Seeing you above on the lead horse helps him accept you in that position. Riding while leading him on figures helps him understand the process (the other horse is doing it, too) and later, riding out safely while ponying him helps him learn to go down the trail (leading him walkabout with another, solid horse in-hand helps, too).



If you’ve never ponied a horse before, watch someone experienced in doing it. You must keep both horses and *yourself* safe! If you do so riding in a saddle, do not dally or wrap the lead shank (or reins) around a saddle horn. You don’t want to “tie” the ponied horse to the horse you’re riding.



Make turns by “leading” the ponied horse beside you and by “pushing” him/her with your mount. This rider is riding serpentine around cones in an enclosed arena. Keep the ponied horse beside your leg.



Using each horse's name when needed and staying calm, going slowly, will help you communicate and build their confidence.

If a young horse has concerns about your position above him or her, standing quietly on an object and allowing him to approach *you* is helpful!



Confidence comes from feeling safe. If a horse feels trapped, he will worry. Now, confining him to a roundyard or paddock is a necessity when working with him, but he cannot feel (in his young, learning stages) that he is being *forced* into compliance.

A pleasant experience with you will help him learn by leaps and bounds. An unpleasant experience will shake his confidence and set his learning back. You can undo years of schooling with minutes of aggression or being incongruent.

The minimum amount of equipment (no gadgets) will create the maximum amount of understanding.



Mark the behavior you want with conversation, reward and acknowledging every attempt on his part to please you. Say his name often. Know that, horses hear sounds differently than we do. He is sensitive to higher pitched noises and can hear things in the distance (quite far away!) that we cannot perceive.

Make the difference between acceptable behavior and unwanted habits very clear with your adoration of the desired responses. Your horse is not trying to out maneuver you, to defy or ignore you. He will bring to the relationship the same concentration and attitude that you, yourself, bring.



You do not have to confine your horse to interact with him or her. While it is important to teach the horse to stand tied safely and to face some things that are not the most pleasant (Veterinary visits, hoof trimming, etc.), even they can be made tolerable if you are fully present and comforting of him.

