

The Confidence Techniques



There are an unlimited number of ways you can use to bring a variety of “puzzles” or experiences to your horse that help him feel confident.

You can begin with a towel folded up small in your hand to “groom” him; then unfold it bit by bit until you are rubbing him all over with the entire towel. If at any point he becomes worried, refold the towel and begin again. It does not matter how long it takes. You are showing him that he can trust you – so set him up for success; show him that it will not harm him (and never use an object to punish or harm him!).

When the towel is a pleasant experience for the horse, you can use a piece of plastic of similar size. Fold it up to size of a grooming tool and repeat the same, slow process. Listen to the horse! Use the ASK concepts in our module and watch his signals of acceptance or concern and proceed accordingly.

Big Ball Technique

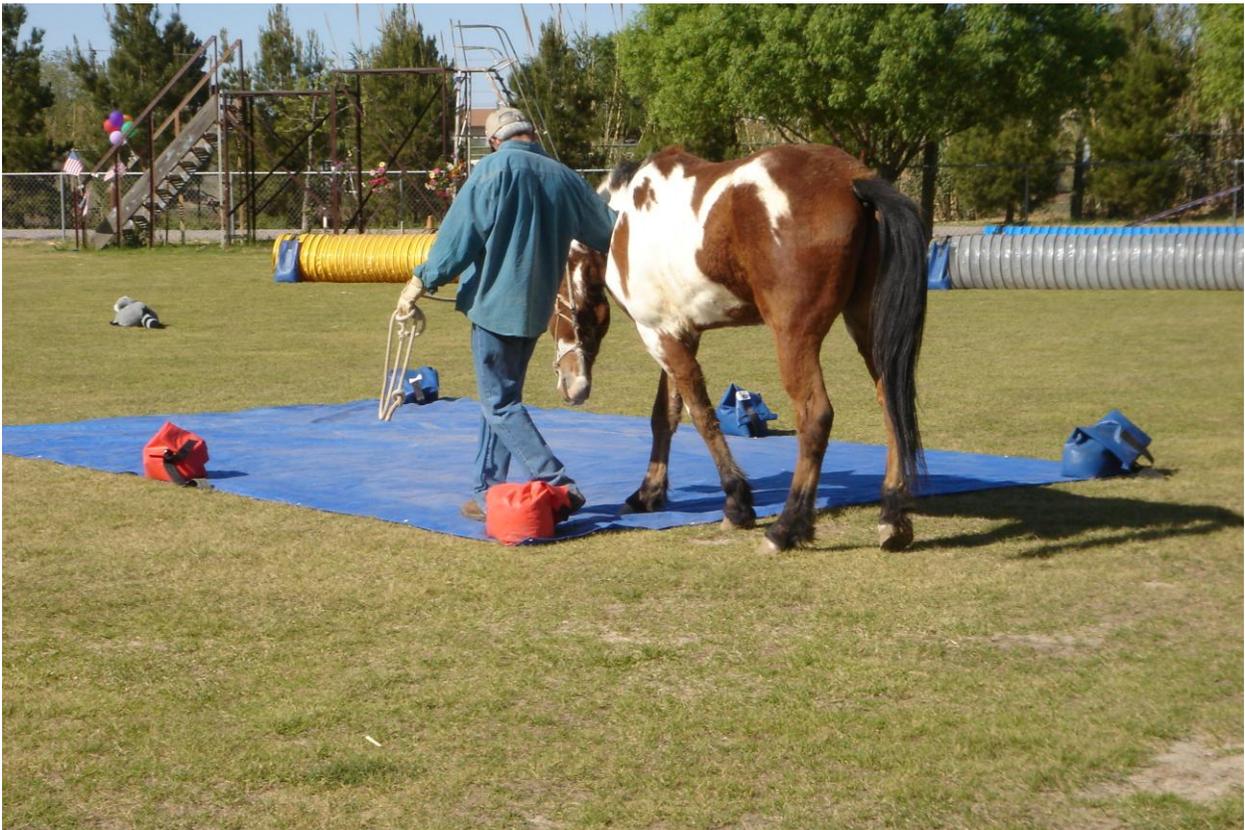


Using an exercise ball (or other, large object you can roll), lead your horse up near it. Have an assistant to roll it slowly *away* from him. When he begins to move toward it, stop. Let him approach the object. As his confidence grows, you can move it toward him, but proceed slowly so that you do not shake his confidence.

Less is more; slow is fast

Dry Tarp, Wet Tarp

Walking over tarps is simply an exercise in trust that helps your horse feel confident walking with you over and through objects you might encounter out on the trail, when loading in a float or around the stable yard.



We secure the tarp with sand bags and start with it dry. We walk over the corner ourselves, letting the horse walk by, outside the tarp, at first. As he gains confidence, we allow him to just step over the corner of the tarp. Working up to walking across the tarp, we will halt in the middle of it and reward the horse

generously. We want this experience to be a “positive drop” in his well of experiences.

When things are going well and everyone is calm, we’ll repeat the process under saddle. Then, we return to in-hand and flood some water onto the tarp, allowing the horse to gradually build confidence with repetition of the original exercise.

If we have a horse whose past experiences or his own nature cause him to worry, we’ll bring a “lead horse” to do the exercises in front of him. You cannot force confidence; you earn it and you teach it.

The whole idea of struggle brings you to a point of conflict, the antithesis of horsemanship ~ Katharine

Balloons

Helium filled balloons can be useful to help your horse feel confident around objects that move on their own.



We suggest working in-hand with every new project to help the horse feel secure. “Lead” horses (older, confident, experienced equines) can make a world of difference helping the youngster face new situations. A good example is trailering the young horse with a more experienced partner loaded first into the trailer/float. Being herd animals, they are more likely to feel confident if they are not facing things in isolation. *You* can be their bonded person, but seeing another horse can build extra confidence.

Step Overs Step Onto

If you have done the in-hand schooling and longeing, your horse will have verbal “aids” that help explain to him “walk”, “whoa”, “trot on”, etc. These are very helpful for work over and onto obstacles.



Starting with a pole on the ground, you can make patterns and puzzles to walk through, then trot through first in-hand, then under saddle. You add objects and difficulty (patterns, stopping and turning within them, etc.) as your horse builds confidence.



Be creative. Be patient. Be calm.



Danglers

Walking through dangling objects is a challenge for the horse. To ease him into it; have assistants hold the danglers to the side and walk him through the middle several times (in hand at first) to build his confidence.





We have built frames like this and spread a tarp over the top to walk under (often with a lead horse) which helps the horse gain confidence for stepping into a

trailer/float. Add strong sheets of plywood to step onto and off of; walk onto them, halt and back out; turn while on the plywood and just get creative while always rewarding the “try”.

The difference between these techniques and “*bomproofing*” is the manner in which you introduce challenges to the horse. Some trainers fill a roundyard with objects and chase the horse ‘round and ‘round until his apprehension is exhausted, his response broken and his body worn out. We call this “flooding” and will not promote it – ever.

Resistance in a horse will come from confusion, fear or bad memories that are triggered. His sense of self preservation will take over at these times and his instinct of flight or even fight will rise to the surface because he genuinely fears for his life. To push him past that is to bring him to resignation of his own death. After that, he may be totally tractable, totally at your mercy and will become an automaton with no life force left. This is not relationship. This is domination at best, subjugation at worst.