

~ Friendship Training ~

Friendship Training is based on the Peer Attachment equine relationship found in any feral or domestic herd. Unlike the normal hierarchal herd relationship, this is an extremely intimate, harmonious relationship not shared with other herd members. The entire focus of Friendship Training is establishing and nurturing a true interspecies friendship between a horse, (regardless of age, breed, gender, or previous life experiences) and a human. Though behavior modification occurs, it is incidental. Perception modification, (how the horse perceives and regards us) is paramount.

Horses Never Forget Human Friends

<http://news.discovery.com/animals/horse-friends-memory-trainers.html>

The Three Principles of Friendship Training

I. Make my horse feel they are the most special horse in the world.

This is the goal of the Friendship Training Exercises. Combined, they are the means that offers the opportunity to reach the essential levels of intimacy to make the horse feel they are not only 'special,' but overwhelmingly appreciated and loved.

II. Give my horse every opportunity to live a stress-free, pain-free, joyful life.

From birth to death, giving our horse a stress-free, pain-free, joyful life encompasses a wide range of subjects that affect our horse's emotional and physical well-being. Stress hormones diminish learning. Positive reinforcement is more efficient and long-lasting.

Bitless, hoof care, social environment, nutrition and physical conditioning are basic considerations.

III. The relationship I share with my horse and their well-being, will take precedence over all else, regardless of where we are, or what we are doing.

For what we share is priceless.

The Three Guidelines of Friendship Training

I. Freedom of Choice (We ask, not order.)

II. Freedom of Movement (No restriction of any kind may used for teaching/training.)

III. Freedom of Expression (The horse is always encouraged to express their feelings, as long as it does not in any way injure their human teacher).

For there is no such thing as a bad horse. They can only be what you allow them to be. You, and only you, hold the power to make them friend, or foe.

The Path to Intimacy

Phase 1. Preconditioning.

During this phase, the horse is fed at the same time and place in an open area where they do not feel restricted.

*All interactives, (Friendship Training Exercises called FTXs) are held in an open area because the horse's primary means of survival is flight. Restricting a horse and forcing it to do something creates stress and/or fear that diminishes learning and results in a confrontational, negative relationship.

During this phase, their human teacher learns more about their horse's emotional, physical, nutritional, social and instinctive needs in a natural life environment based on ethological documentaries.

Also during this phase, the teacher practices using a combined 'sign language with voice' that will enhance their ability to talk to their horse. Voice tone and volume, facial expression and body language will later be added to this 'sign language with voice' to micro-adjust communication to each specific situation and to enhance that crucial 'bridge language' between them.

The hand-face-body cue/requests are used because the majority of the horse's communication is with their body. This makes it easier for the horse to learn and understand what we are asking. They are also combined with a vocal word to enhance the 'bridge language' they share. The vocal cue/requests are later transferred to minute physical cue/requests in the riding phase. This is crucial as communication is the building block of trust. ALL reciprocal communication from the horse is encouraged throughout the relationship building process, (with the exception of actions that may directly injure their human teacher).

*Several decades ago, an Internationally renown equine ethologist, (Marthe Kiley-Worthington) taught a small herd of horses over 250 words.

http://eco-etho-research.blogspot.com/2009_01_01_archive.html

"Horses are able to learn and memorize human words and can hear the human voice better than even dogs."

http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/35911274/ns/technology_and_science-science/

Phase 2. First Lessons.

In this phase, (in the same open area where the horse does not feel any pressure of restriction or confinement) the horse learns to do several very simple, easy to understand, easy to do exercises, (Back, Stand, and Come).

The horse also learns the beginnings of patience and that coming to their teacher when requested, (or of their own choice) and touching them gently with their nose in a specific manner is overwhelmingly appreciated. Praise is always liberally applied by the teacher.

Phase 3. Walking the Clock.

In this phase, the horse learns the patience to Stand more than momentarily. This is beneficial when mounting, adjusting tack or blankets, vet check, taking temperature, farrier work, and many other situations in their domestic life.

Phase 4. Tactile/Interactive Habituation.

In this phase, the horse learns to accept unnatural and/or uncomfortable mild invasives such as hoof care, overall body touch/massage, dental exams and injections.

Phase 5. Paired and Individual Movements.

In this phase, the horse learns various movements, (such as sidepass, turn on forehand/haunches, etc) and to lead, (learning right and left, Gee-Haw, Whoa, trot, forward and lunge without restraints in the same open, unrestricted area.

Phase 6. Walks in the Park.

During this phase, the horse and his teacher go for walks initially of short duration with a lead line and halter to gradually explore their area together. Both distance and duration are gradually increased. Of greatest importance in this phase is the number of 'walks' per week, (at least five or six). Instead of being a sporadic intrusion into the horse's daily life, the 'walks' become an accustomed social sharing of experiences.

Phase 7. Mounted Activity.

During this phase, the horse learns to accept first a saddle and pad and learn to stop immediately when it becomes 'off center' or falls off completely. Sequentially, they also learn to accept the teacher on their back without the saddle and respond to the transference of vocal cue/requests they learned on the ground previously to tactile cue/requests when carrying their teacher, (in a safe area preferably the 'classroom area'). Then the saddle is incorporated with the rider. The same sequential pattern is used as was used with the Walking Phase by gradually extending the initial 'Riding Out' sessions of short periods and distances to longer ones to different locations as the mounted relationship grows in mutual confidence.

Phase 8. Comprehensive Evaluation.

Written assignments and video assessment for evaluation and certification of Amateur Level.

The advancement to each succeeding phase is completely dependent upon the confidence both the horse and his teacher feel they have attained.

There are no time expectations or limitations as to how long it will take any equine, (or their human teacher) to comfortably, safely, move on to the next phase.

The program can be tailored for horses that will not be ridden and horses with severely traumatic experiences.

Friendship Training also gives foals their best possible start in life.

Founder: Charles H. (Chuck) Mintzlaff

Naturalhorse101@aol.com

01 (972) 225-5800

<http://friendshiptraining.org/>

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