

Learn to Earn

Horses who like people often seek for our attention. With some horses, especially youngsters, this can lead to them crowding us, mugging us for food, or trying to get us to join in their rough play behaviour.



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The most important point of all: You represent good things to your horse! Your attention is rewarding and it has the power to motivate your horse to do whatever behaviour is necessary to get it. This may make your horse look 'spoilt'. Make sure that when you give your horse attention it was because he was behaving in a way that you wanted, because you will most certainly get more of it.



Start and end all interactions with your horse yourself. Have a clear start signal - calling your horse and approaching them. Have a clear 'end' signal - a hand gesture and then stop interacting and do something else.

The 'Learn to Earn' program:

1. Aim to give your horse attention when he is calm and relaxed, not when he is excited and pushy.
2. Give your horse other rewards, like bucket food, for calm behaviour, or for performing some response for you - like stepping back for you to put the bucket down (tip! move/slide the bucket towards his front feet).
3. Try to ignore all behaviour that you don't like by avoiding eye contact, speaking and touching, but also by turning your back and calmly walking away if your horse is too persistent.
4. Avoiding contact of any kind through ignoring is simply failure to reward behaviour with attention in most cases. Actively removing yourself is punishing for the attention seeking horse, provided this has the effect of reducing that behaviour.
5. Most horses cope with this, learn not to do the unwanted behaviour, and because you are giving them attention for other behaviour, will actively switch to that other behaviour.
6. Some horses can react badly to such punishment - this is most likely in horses that get highly emotional, often because they are frustrated and/or anxious/fearful. If your horse falls into this category, seek expert help to guide you.