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Project funded by the Virginia Horse Industry Board. Artwork by Pam Talley Stoneburner. Thanks to the Virginia 4-H Cloverbud Advisory Group and Virginia Tech Equine Science Undergraduate Students for ideas and support.

Special thanks to Ellen Cogan for her efforts on this module.

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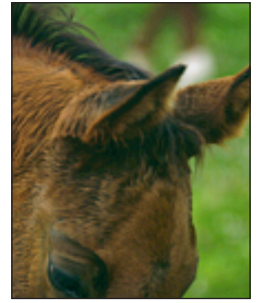
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Produced by Communications and Marketing, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, 2011

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Do You Have Horse Sense!

Since horses don't speak in words, we need to watch their body in order to understand what they're trying to tell us.



What am I thinking?

Introduction

Horses do not speak in words, but they still communicate. They use body language. Understanding horse "language" is important when it comes to safely handling horses. There are several ways horses position their bodies in order to talk to each other.

The direction a horse's **ears** are pointed and how they're held says a lot. Horses will swivel their ears to catch a sound, and can "point" them in two different directions at one time. This can give you a clue where their attention is focused. If both ears are forward, the horse is evaluating or paying attention to something in front of it. If both ears are swiveled toward the back, they're paying attention to something behind. If their ears are pinned to their neck, they're showing anger.

A **tail** held up over their back is a sign of an excited or playful horse, while a tail that's clamped to their hind legs indicates fear or pain. A horse that is whipping its tail through the air is probably angry. One that's gently swishing the tail is probably shooing off flies.

Because their **eyes** are set on the sides of their head, they see in a wider range than people do. Horses can see almost all the way behind them without turning their head, but not right in front of their nose or directly behind their tail. If you walk up to a horse from those areas, they may not realize you're there and can kick you if they're surprised. Also, they have to move their head up or down to focus on something. If their head is up, they're looking further away. If it's down, they're looking at something close to them.

Skill Level: Cloverbud, K-3

Learner Outcomes

1. Identify which parts of the body horses use to communicate.
2. Explain what emotion various equine body postures express or indicate.

Science Standard(s): Life Science/Characteristics of Organisms

Success Indicator: Explain body postures and how those relate to equine communication.

Life Skill(s): Decision-making, Critical thinking, Communication

Tags: Cloverbud, horse, behavior

Time Needed: 15-20 minutes

Materials List

Horse ears picture

Crayons or colored pencils, bendy straws

Pictures of horses: angry (ears pinned), scared (throwing head up), interested (ears perked), sleepy (drowsy expression)

Pictures of people handling horses (magazines, books, or staged photos)

Did You Know?

Horses can't see directly in front of their nose!

Horses can see a different image with each eye – at the same time!

The size of a horse's eyeball is larger than that of any other mammal, including the elephant and whale!

Glossary Words

Blind spots – areas where the horse cannot see without moving its head, such as 4-6 feet directly in front of the horse's face or directly behind the horse's rump

Body language – a non-verbal (silent) method of communication using body gestures and posture

Pinned ears – ears that are laid back flat against the horse's neck, indicating anger

Experience / What to Do

Ask the children if they know how horses talk to each other. Explain “body language”, and have the children act out different emotions (happy, sad, curious, scared, annoyed, confused, etc.). Using pictures from magazines, show horses expressing various emotions. After you've gone over them, have the children go through a different magazine and identify the emotions of the horses in the pictures.

Horse Whisperers

1. Give each child a page with the ears printed out.
2. Have them color the ears and then cut them out.
3. Glue the ears onto bendy straws.
4. Have the children mimic the horse's ear and head position to demonstrate various emotions.
5. As an alternative, have one child demonstrate an emotion with the horse ears and have the other children guess the emotion.

Safe Horse Handling

1. Find pictures that show correct and incorrect handling situations.
2. Discuss with the children how to properly approach and move around a horse.
 - a. Approach the horse at the shoulder, walking slowly and speaking quietly.
 - b. When going behind the horse, either be up close and touch the horse, or be at least 6 feet away.
 - c. When leaving the horse, walk away quietly; don't run or shout.
3. Use the pictures to have children identify the correct and incorrect methods in each case.
4. Alternatively, have the children practice appropriate (or inappropriate!) ways of approaching a horse, with one child being the “handler” and the other being the “horse.” Use the ears from the previous activity for emphasis.

For More Information

Search www.extension.org/ for additional information.

References

“Equine Science – Basic Knowledge for Horse People of All Ages” by Jean T. Griffiths. www.Horsebooksetc.com or Phone: 1-800-952-5813

“Horse Science” by Ray Antoniewicz. www.4-hmall.org/detail.aspx?ID=16681

“Horses & Horsemanship” by Ray Antoniewicz. www.4-hmall.org/detail.aspx?ID=16680

Talk It Over

Share . . .

1. What did you learn about today?
2. Share an example of a time you saw a horse express an emotion. What did the horse do? Why did they do what they did?

Reflect . . .

1. Why is it important to know how a horse sees?

Generalize . . .

1. What are some ways you communicate using only your body?
2. How do other animals express their emotions? How do dogs express anger? Fear?

Apply . . .

1. How will you use what you learned today when you go to a new barn or horse show and are around horses you don't know?

More Ideas!

Obstacle Course

1. Set up this obstacle course ahead of time. You can do this in a room in a house or in a barn aisle.
 - a. Set up noisy things (tarps, plastic grocery bags) so that they'll hang in the air or blow in the wind. Turn on a fan to blow on them if that helps.
 - b. Visual objects, such as open umbrellas or beach balls, can be placed along a walking path.
 - c. Dangerous objects could be anything that might get stepped on or underfoot if the horse spooks. Grooming tools left haphazardly around, halters or lead ropes piled on the ground, or muck forks (tines up) make good hazards. Also, a dark towel or cloth, formed in a circle, can simulate a hole.
2. Explain to the children the importance of a safe environment. Have them list some items or situations at a barn that could be dangerous to horses.
3. Individually or in pairs, have the children navigate the obstacle course and identify dangerous objects or situations. Have them explain how they think the horse would react and why it's dangerous.
4. Have them go back through and make the obstacle course safe.

Practice Makes Perfect!

Before the children make the obstacles course safe:

1. Divide them up into pairs.
2. Have one child hold the snap of the lead rope or attach it to their belt while the other child holds the rope properly to lead.
3. Have the leader lead the "horse" through the obstacle course. Coach the "horse" on how to be afraid of or worried about the appropriate obstacles.
4. Have the children switch roles, this time coaching the leader on how to safely lead the horse around the obstacles.
5. They can also practice leading through gates and around other "horses" and people.

