

Making Life A TTouch Easier

...Teaching, or re-teaching, a horse to tie

By Robyn Hood

Don't you envy horse owners who can tie old Smokey just anywhere and leave him alone for an hour, knowing he will still be there when they return? They either own the perfect horse, or have done their homework well.

Owners of a horse who doesn't tie know the problems that go with it. You can never leave the horse unattended and, if your horse ties only some of the time, it takes time, effort and worries to find the right place to tie him. We all know stories of horses who have pulled a rail off the fence and panicked when the rail chased them, and ended up running over people, breaking their legs or being impaled. Seldom does such a horror story have a happy ending.

Getting a horse to stand without being tied or while ground tied is an excellent exercise in self-control and patience. Unfortunately some methods advocate tying the horse "hard and fast" then startling the horse so he comes against the rope and "learns" he can't get away. This does not work with every horse and it keeps vets, who have to look at broken withers and injured necks, TTEAM practitioners, chiropractors, and all other body workers busy.

Teaching a young horse to tie and not just letting him struggle against the strongest halter and rope known to man is a process well worth taking. We can use the same steps for retraining a confirmed "halter breaker".

Long before Linda developed TTEAM we taught our young horses to tie by bringing them in to be groomed with their mothers. We simply wrapped the rope around the hitching rail and held the end. If the horse came up against the rope and pulled back, the rope gave. Then we asked the youngster to come forward with a signal on the rope. After several sessions the horse could be tied securely. Moreover he knew that when the rope got tight, he only had to step forward to release the pressure.

It is a reflex for a horse to pull when he feels pressure on the top of his poll and if he is tight in the neck the flight instinct is even stronger. Of course some horses react more strongly to being restrained for the first time than others do. Remember that up to this point the foal could always go where he pleased. All of a sudden, something is keeping him back and it's not all that comfortable.

The video, "Haltering A Foal Without Trauma" demonstrates how to use the TTouch on the crest of the foal's neck to teach him to drop his head, instead of raising it, when he feels pressure. The next step is to teach him to lead using the body rope and a light lead shank attached to the ring at the side of the halter instead of the ring underneath. When pressure comes

from under the jaw the tendency is for the horse to raise his head and when the rope tightens it forces the horse's nose forward and the head often goes up and the horse pulls back. Stand beside the horse and combine an "ask & release" signal from the body rope followed by the halter signal to reassure the horse and teach him to come forward when he feels pressure on the halter.

Now pass the rope around the hitching rail or post and hold the end of the rope while you stroke the horse with the wand. If the horse pulls back against pressure, give a little and then give the horse a signal with the rope to come forward. Grooming can be done while you are holding the end of the rope. After a couple of sessions you can add another wrap around the post and tie a release knot as shown in the drawing. The double loop around the rail prevents the knot from tightening, in case the horse pulls.

Make sure to set the situation up for success rather than failure. Don't practice on the busiest day when tractors, bicycles and other distractions are moving around the horse. Give the horse a good reason to stay at the hitching rail, such as feeding him or having his friend stand quietly beside him.

To retrain a confirmed puller, it is safer to work in an area with a wall or fence as a parameter, limiting how far back he can go. The barrier may help him feel safer and prevent him from just flying back.

In Australia it is common to tie horses with a piece of baler twine to the hitching rail. If the horse pulls back hard, the twine breaks instead of the halter or rope and the horse doesn't get hurt. In this way, the struggle or fight (a potentially dangerous or injurious incident), is reduced to a simple snap of the twine.

"But now you have taught him to break free "you say? No, simply retie him to another piece of twine and continue with your grooming. Of course you want to stay close to the horse in the beginning so he doesn't take off down the road. Do it in a small area where you can catch him easily and retie him right away. The horse will quickly learn that when he is tied he is not in danger of getting hurt should he pull back and break a couple of strings he will feel safe enough to quietly stand while tied.

Most horses who pull back when tied are tight and sore in the poll area, mid neck and the base of the neck where it joins the shoulder. Since many of these horses are high headed, start with the TTouch, to teach the horse to lower his head. This breaks the flight instinct and helps him relax. Stroke the underside of the neck, the chest and legs with a wand. Use the TTouches, as described in the checklist, to soften tightness in

the poll and neck. Heat, in form of a Thermo pad or warm towel often greatly helps overcome soreness.

Taming the Tiger is useful in retraining a horse to tie or, in an emergency situation as a way to containing a horse who has never been tied. It gives the horse a parameter without offering something against which he can react. If the horse pulls back against the rope let the long line slide, stroke the horse's back with the wand and tap the hindquarters to ask him to step forward.

Prepare a horse or foal for the experience of being tied while he is away from the hitching rail. Use the Dingo and Dancing Cobra as leading exercises to teach the horse to come forward when he feels pressure on the halter. He will also learn what the wand means.

When using crossties, make sure the horse can lower his head comfortably. Many crossties are set too high and force the horse to stand with his head high and back dropped. Crossties are difficult for horses who are afraid of things behind them, for they make it hard for the horse to turn his head to see what's going on around him.

I think it is our responsibility to make our horse's training as accident-free as possible. Neck muscles and withers are not yet replaceable, if injured when a horse goes over backwards.



Photo 1: One way to lower a horse's head. After stroking the horse's neck, chest and legs to accustom him to the wand, squat down in front of the horse. As you stroke the horse down the neck, chest and legs, ask him to lower his head with a milking signal on the lead. Note: If you are not comfortable about squatting in front of your horse move slightly to one side.



Photo 2: Most horses that pull back when tied are tense in the neck. Use a combination of TTouches on the neck such as the Clouded Leopard, Snail's Pace, Inch Worm or Bear TTouch to relax the neck. The use of heat in the form of Thermo-pads or warm towels helps overcome soreness.

Just because he gets up right away and has not a scratch doesn't mean the horse could not have been seriously hurt. The withers are fairly small bones that may not take kindly to 1000 pounds of horse landing on them.

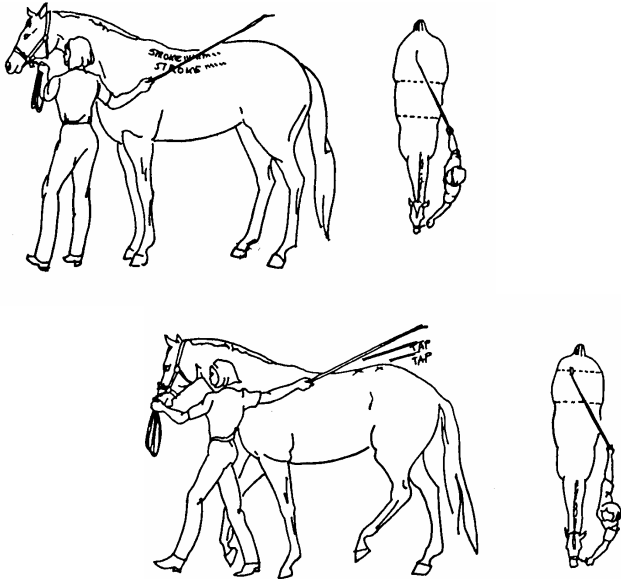
If tying is one of the first exercises you teach a young horse, keep in mind that you are not only teaching him to tie, but also you are setting a trend in his attitude toward learning and interacting with people. Would you rather have him learn to fight and struggle and get hurt or would you prefer him to have trust, confidence and self-control? It's up to you. Here is a checklist of TTEAM techniques to help if you prefer the latter.

- TTouches to soften the horse's neck:
 - Clouded Leopard
 - Jellyfish Jiggle
 - Bear TTouch
 - Snail's Pace
 - Inch Worm
- TTouch under the scapula to release the lower neck and shoulder.
- Lower the horse's head using the wand.
- Neck release to open the throatlatch - see July-Sept 2002 issue
- Ground exercises using Dingo & Dancing Cobra
- Taming the Tiger while grooming
- Grooming with lead wrapping once around hitching rail
- Tying with double wrap and quick release knot.



Drawing: The Inch Worm helps release tension along the nuchal ligament. Place both hands on top of the crest 4 - 6" apart. With just enough downward pressure to keep contact, move your hands towards each other by moving the horse's crest. Hold for a few seconds and then slowly bring your hands to the starting point. Pause and keeping the same contact, spread your hands apart, with one hand going towards the ears and the other towards the withers, gently "stretching" the tissue on the crest and

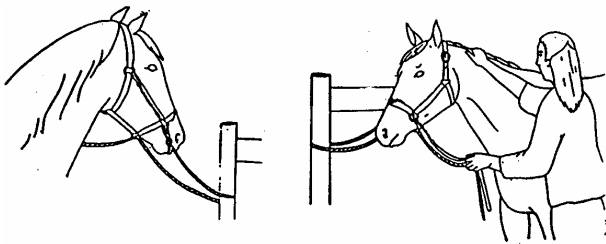
slowly release back to the starting point. Move your hands a few inches and repeat.



Dingo — One reason we use this exercise is to teach a horse to come forward when he feels a signal on the halter.

- 1) Steady back lightly on the lead
- 2) Stroke two or three times with the wand from the wither, across the back, over the croup
- 3) Signal forward with the lead (very important to be clear with this step to make the connection to tying)
- 4) Scoop the croup with a forward, flicking motion of the wand with the wrist, two or three times on the croup as you step forward.

Look in the direction you want to go. If your horse tends to be a bit “stuck”, move his head slightly away from you to help release his poll.

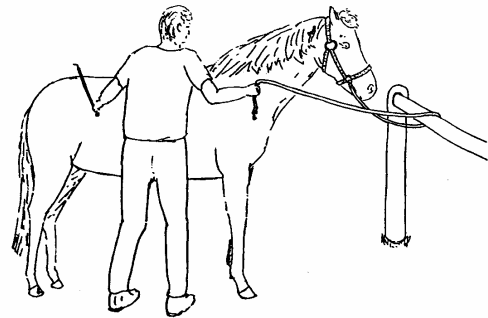


Taming The Tiger — This “half-tie” can be used safely in an emergency situation to hold a horse who has never been tied, in retraining a horse who pulls or to teach a horse to cross-tie.

Attach the lead to the ring on the side you are standing (or over the noseband of the halter or up the side of the halter if you are using the chain or soft lead). Take one end of a 15 – 20’ rope, run it through the lower ring of the halter, around a post or through a ring, on the opposite side of the horse, and tie it back to that side of the halter.

The end of the rope is held in the same hand as the lead line, with the index finger separating them. Your other hand is free to stroke and tap with the wand to signal the horse to come forward if he pulls back. It is ideal to use Taming the Tiger in a corner of a pen or a stall to provide a natural barrier behind the horse. If you are in a space with no “back” a pole can be laid about four feet behind the horse to give him a parameter.

If the horse pulls back, let the long rope slide and follow the horse back, then bring him forward with the dingo and reposition the rope.

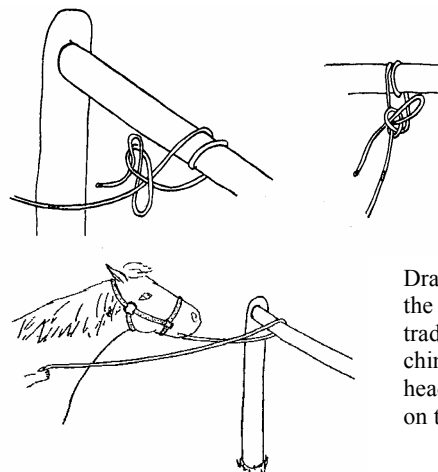


Drawing: Shows another step in teaching, or re-teaching a horse to tie. The lead line is attached to the side ring on the halter; the rope is around the hitching rail and held by the handler. **NOTE:** This should never be done using a chain over the horse’s nose. The lead attached to the side ring of the halter only works if the snap is not too heavy and the halter fits well, otherwise it will slide around the horse’s head. Attaching the lead to the side encourages a horse’s head to come down, rather than up, if there is tension on the lead. If the halter fits well we usually attach the lead ropes to the side for tying, leading and trailering.

From this position the handler can give a signal on the rope and, if the horse does not move forward, a signal from the wand can be added.

When the lead is attached to the ring under the jaw, as shown in the drawing below, and there is forward pressure the horse’s head is actually pulled up, which can trigger the flight instinct and reflexive pulling.

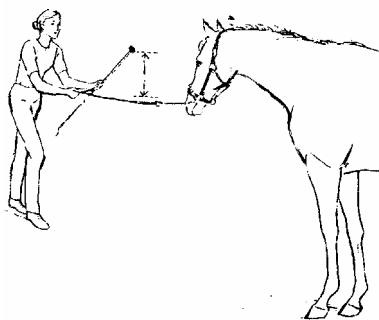
When the horse moves forward, instead of back, when he feels the pressure from the rope you could start and tie him more securely. At this point you could tie a breakable piece of twine around the rail or a ring. Tie the rope to the twine instead of an unbreakable object. When you do tie to a solid object use a release knot, shown below, with a second wrap around the post or hitching rail. The second wrap keeps the knot from tightening should a horse put any pressure on the rope. Most people have experienced “quick release” knots becoming “un-releasable” should a horse pull.



Drawing left: shows how the rope attached in the traditional way, under the chin, can raise a horse’s head if he should pull back on the rope

Dancing Cobra

This leading position helps improve balance, focus, obedience and response to the aids. An excellent exercise when re-educating a horse that pulls back when tied. The horse learns to come forward from a signal on the halter rather than pull back.



The easiest way to get into the Dancing Cobra is to start out in the Elegant Elephant – facing in the same direction as the horse with the end of the lead and wand in your outside hand. Your inside hand slides at least 18" from the chain or soft lead; from this position step around in front of your horse so you are facing him. With the wand in your left hand, the "button" end should be angled across your body.

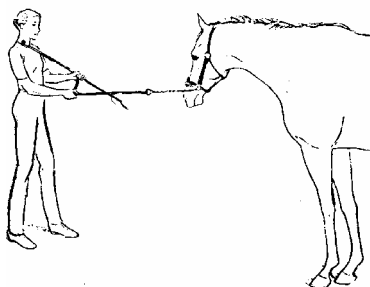
The drawing above shows the "wait" position. The horse shouldn't move until you ask.

Keep a light connection, on the lead, with your right hand while the wand signals "wait".

Your upper body will be slightly inclined toward the horse with your hip joints and knees soft to stay in balance. Be sure one foot is just ahead of the other but with each on their own track (as opposed to one foot directly behind the other).

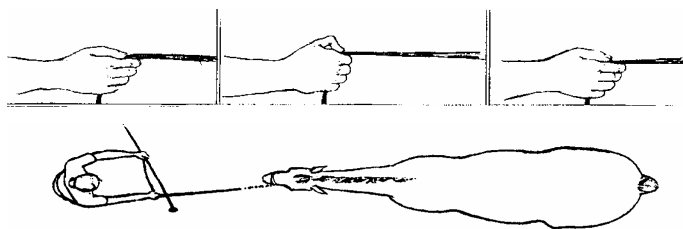


The overhead view shows the "wait" position with the handler holding the wand at the "button" with the soft end towards the horse's nose. Some horses find this easier because the handler is farther away from the horse.



The next position shows the handler in the "get read to move" position.

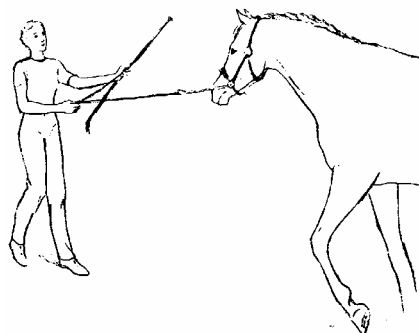
- Shift your upper body upright
- Bring your wand towards you, across your chest, to "open the door"
- At this point you have not given a signal on the lead to come forward but just told the horse something is about to happen
- If you use the entire length of the wand, bring it away from your horse's nose at an angle across the lead line, but not as close to your body as when the button end is up



"Now come"

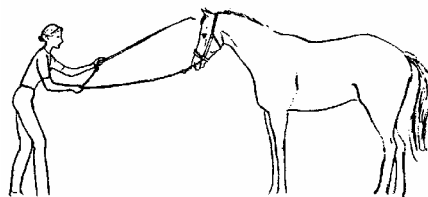
The drawing above shows the line in your hand. To give a "come forward" signal use a light signal and release as shown. The signal should be subtle and if your horse is coming forward too quickly or taking too many steps, before responding to the "whoa", make the signal from your hand lighter. Remember that the horse will come forward on the release rather than the ask.

- signal "come" as described above, this gives pressure on the halter like when the horse is tied.



- step back as you give the signal with your hand

- As the horse steps forward bring the wand towards the horse's head to indicate "come slowly"



WHOA – The horse should only take one or two steps and stop. Stop your horse with a light tap on the noseband of the halter or the chain – if the button end of the wand is towards the horse

Or, if the button end is in your hand. A light flick of the soft end of the wand towards the horse's nose. The flicking is like dabbing paint and should be done more actively, rather than harder, if the horse does not respond.

If your horse raises his head or won't come forward when given a signal, with the chain over his nose, change the position of the chain. Instead of being threaded over the noseband take the chain through the bottom ring, straight up the side of his halter, through the top ring and attach the snap onto the chain. In this position the signal encourages the horse's head to come down and forward.