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## *"Safety when on the ground"*

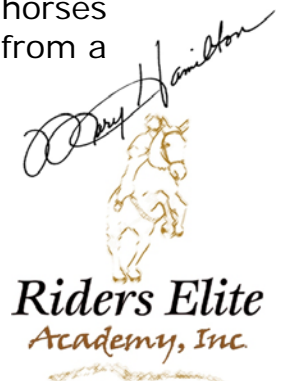
Respect and obedience begins with ground work. It is the foundational relationship between you and your horse. A horse that's well mannered and respectful on the ground translates into a well behaved partner when you ride. To build a respectful partnership, your goal is to have your horse respect your space, yield to pressure and look to you for direction.

### **Personal Space**

A horse that is disrespectful and moves into your personal space can hurt you. In the world of horse they use kicks, bites, head butts and pushes to move other horses out of their space. This establishes leadership and dominance. It determines who is large and in charge and who is lower in the pecking order. A common mistake is to allow your horse to rub its itchy head on you. A playful rub can turn into a head butt that knocks its owner unconscious. Anytime a horse enters your personal space push them away. Achieve this by yielding them using fingertip pressure or twirling the end of the lead rope toward the offending body part until they yield and step away.

### **Approach**

Take a few moments to observe your horse before you enter the pasture or stall. If your horse is preoccupied with an important activity like eating grain, wait a few minutes until they have finished. Now you will have their full attention. Be aware of other horses in the pasture and their possible reaction. Even if they appear to be grazing quietly when you enter they could all charge the gate as you lead your horse out. Stampede! Twirl the end of the lead rope to move other horses away from a gate or enlist a helper to safely remove your horse from a group.





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When riding we half halt or prepare our horse before cueing for a new movement. It signals them to get ready and prepare for a change. It's the same when catching your horse. Speak to your horse as you approach so they are not startled. This informs them where you are.

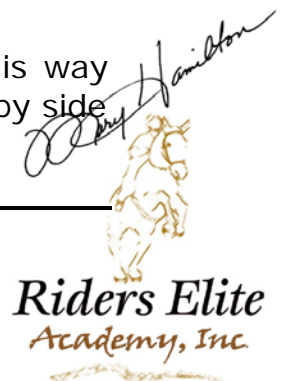
Horse's eyes are positioned on the side of their head. This allows them to detect predators in almost 340 degrees as they graze. But they do have two blind spots. One directly in front and one directly in back. Don't approach from these blind spots as your horse can't see you. Horse's have powerful hind legs. It is not unusual for them for kick out to defend themselves when startled.

### **Catching**

Do you march right up to your horse in the pasture and wonder why you can't catch him? By using this direct approach your horse perceives you as a predator, stalking his prey. No wonder they run. To catch your horse, approach from the side, instead of square on. Approach with slow, smooth movements. If you need to look at your horse, look at their shoulder not their eye. When you reach your horse's shoulder give him a rub. Then slide the lead rope over his neck grasping the two ends. I like to use the snap on the end to clip to the rope making a loop with an end I can hold on to. Carefully slide the halter on the muzzle and over the head. Make sure your halter fits properly and is neither too loose nor too tight. Adjust the halter with enough room at the throat latch to slide a hand through. The noseband should lie two fingers below the cheekbone. You should then be able to fit two fingers between your horse and the noseband. Practice catching your horse when you don't intend to ride him. This way he doesn't associate the halter with work.

### **Leading**

Lead from a position just in front of your horses shoulder. This way they can clearly see you and follow your movements. This side by side





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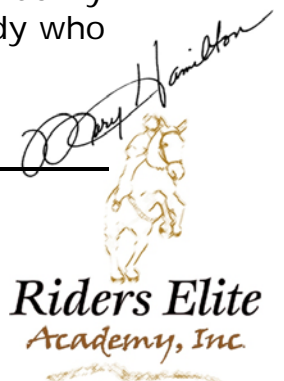
position allows you to use your elbow to push your horse away if he crowds you and invades your personal space.

Use a lead rope! I've seen people lead their horses by the halter rings and break fingers when the horse spooks. Hold the lead rope 8—10 inches from the snap. Allow some slack. Ropes can quickly get us into trouble. Never wrap a rope around your hand instead hold the excess rope in folded loops. This puts you in a position to safely let go of the rope if you need to.

When leading a horse into a pasture or stall, turn your horse to face you and the gate or stall door before releasing him. Make your horse stand quietly a few seconds before letting them go free. This will prevent them from bolting away and kicking you in the process. It's safest to remove the halter during turnout. If you must turn your horse out with a halter on, use one with a leather breakaway feature. This will break more easily if a horse becomes entangled, than a nylon halter would.

### **Police Story**

Even the consummate, professional mounted police officer makes an occasional error in judgement. After a hard days work in 90 plus degree weather, my partner Mike was hot, tired, and sweaty. He was dreaming of airconditioning, a refreshing shower and maybe even a cold beer. His horse Ace was tired too. Ace was lagging behind as he was led to the trailer. Boom! A car backfires behind them. And their off! Ace spooks forward knocking Mike to the ground. I heard Mike call out a foot chase on the police radio. I thought, "Why is he huffing and puffing so much if he's on his horse?". Then the citizens began to call 911. "Dispatch to squad 7300, report of; Loose horse running in yards, loose horse eating valuable shrubbery, loose horse leaving manure." Now I knew why. Mike was in a foot chase to catch his horse. Luckily tragedy was avoided. Capture came in the form of a little old lady who caught Ace with a carrot bribe in her garden.





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There is nothing better than a respectful, well mannered horse. To establish a relaxed and confident relationship with your horse be consistent with personal space and proper leading position. Make cues simple and clear so your horse knows the rules. This ensures your

