

## Disciplining horses

Hitting or harsh interaction with horses is prohibited

Striking, whipping, swatting, or using harsh interactions (such as hard pops on the noseband and fast backing) is prohibited. We are responsible for kind, respectful interactions with all the horses we care for and harsh corrections and punishment are inconsistent with this core value.

Punishing negative behavior in horses certainly is one way to change or modify a behavior. But there are also many positive behaviors change techniques that are effective.

Naïve or inexperienced onlookers may observe someone with more experience using harsh techniques on horses and try to emulate or copy these techniques without the proper training or foundation for applying them. Therefore, we will not defer to a handler's or trainer's experience and 'expertise' in using these techniques in our barns. **They are simply prohibited.**

Rather than trying to figure out what is an 'acceptable' amount of punishment and who should be administering it, we have decided that no cruelty or any interaction that makes a horse fearful is acceptable. We can do better.

Sometimes people will strike a horse when it reacts to something that startles it (or the handler). They see the horse's natural reaction as 'naughty'. We try to better understand the behavior and learn to help the horse rather than punish the behavior.

The following excerpt on punishment hits the mark as to how sophisticated and planful one must be to make punishment an effective behavior change technique. It is simply not a good way to interact with horses (or humans) when we have so many more effective tools at hand.

**Punishment** is also known as aversive conditioning. It is any unpleasant event that lowers the chance that a behavior will be repeated. Punishment is not the same as negative reinforcement. To be most successful, punishment must occur as early as possible (within a few seconds of the start of the behavior), and it must be consistent and appropriate. Critical factors in punishment include timing, consistency, appropriate intensity, and the presence of a reward after the undesirable behavior ends. This is the

most frequently ignored part of treatment for people whose horses have behavior problems.

Owners often resort to physical punishment as the first choice, but punishment does not need to be physical. *Furthermore, punishment is just as hard to use correctly as counterconditioning and desensitization. Punishment is never an “easy out” and has a high chance of failure. It can also lead to other negative consequences, such as increased fear or aggression.*

If anyone is having trouble managing an undesirable behavior, our trainers will assist them to come up with a consistent and positive approach to teach the horse the expected behavior using positive approaches.

If anyone is seen using punishment or harsh corrections, please intervene and refer them to the barn manager so we can give them additional training. Education and high expectations are what will create positive change.