

Approaching a Horse

There are a number of things to keep in consideration when approaching a loose horse.



Be familiar with the horse's field of vision and never approach from a horse's blind spot. Consider other animals and their position and possible reactions in the pasture. Read the horse's attitude by watching his body language. Speak calmly and confidently. Approach the horse's shoulder to limit the horse's ability to move away. From this position, the handler is able to step toward the head or tail to prevent the horse's escape. This angle also helps a handler avoid contact with both the front and hind feet.

Another point to consider when approaching and working with horses is the horse's flight zone. The **flight zone** is the horse's "personal space". Movement into the flight zone will cause the animal to move away. Understanding the flight zone can reduce stress and help prevent accidents to handlers. The size of the flight zone depends on the tameness or wildness of the horse. With frequent handling, the flight zone decreases in size and may even disappear. A horse that is approached head on has a larger flight zone than if it is approached from the side. The edge of the flight zone can be determined by slowly walking up to the horse. The point at which the horse begins to move away is the edge of the flight zone.

The best place for a handler to work is on the edge of the flight zone. There is a point-of-balance for moving animals back or forward. The point-of-balance is at the shoulder, perpendicular to the length of the body. Stand in front of the point-of-balance to back the horse up and to the rear of the point-of-balance to move the animal forward. If a handler enters the flight zone too deeply and quickly, the horse will either bolt and run away or turn back and run over the person. It is important to be aware of the flight zone and the horse's response to the handler within and near the flight zone. This will help to ensure safety at all times for the handler.

Trust is essential when working with and around horses. Establish a relaxed and confident relationship with the horse. A horse should willingly accept a person's presence. It is important to have confidence in the horse's manners and behavior. However, never take an animal for granted and always be alert when working with any horse.