



↑ [4.5 A & B] Young foals will nicker and “clack” their teeth together as a sign of submissiveness to show older horses they know they are young and pose no threat. Here a filly nibbles at her older sister, trying to engage her to wake up and play (A) and a colt clacks at his father, showing submissive respect (B).



top of the tail, as a way to test for acceptance. Squeals may also be used after a social greeting, sometimes combined with a leg strike. Ever notice how when your horse greets another horse and one of them squeals, only the humans are startled by it? That is because your horse understands what is being said: Sometimes a squeal can represent a challenge to another horse, or it can simply mean they are just mutually coming to an agreement. Individual vocalizations can mean different things, depending on the individuals and circumstances (figs. 4.5 A & B).

When horses are separated from a group, they will use vocalizations—usually a long whinny—and then wait for a response to guide them. Horses who are gone from a group and then return use gentle nickers as soft “hello” greetings. This communication also occurs

alarm, greetings, and expressing emotions. Grunts, snorts, squeals, and blows are also forms of vocalization. Grunts and snorts can be heard when horses are unsure of new objects or curious about something. Some horses use snorts or blows through the nostrils as greetings. Squeals are often sounded by youngsters expressing joy and by mares engaged in courtship with stallions. During breeding season, squeals can be heard as a stallion gently nips a mare, either on the flanks or the



↙ [4.6 A-C] Stallion posturing. In (A) note the eye roll and hyperflexed neck in the pinto. This is usually only seen in stallions. The buckskin in (B) shows confidence while the roan observes and backs off. The tails, ears, and eyes in both indicate that neither wants a fight. In (C) we see two stallions, most likely brothers, mimicking each other's body language.

when a foal who has been sleeping wakes up and wants to nurse—both mom and baby exchange a gentle nickering dialogue.

Again, various herd cultures use communication differently. Not all horses communicate exactly the same way because they have learned different signals.

★ TIP: / Vocalizations are primarily used to sound alarm, call herd mates, participate in courtship, express feelings, or greet another. /

— Body Language

Body language includes eyes, ears, facial expressions, tail, body postures, and movement, which are all constantly used to communicate among herd mates and

offspring. From calming signals to alarm, body language can be subtle or loud, depending upon the herd's culture. It can also mean slightly different things, depending on the herd. Hence, horses tend to combine eye contact, smell, and their “subtle energy awareness,” as well as body language, to assess meaning of each other's communication. My field observations often found two horses, usually stallions, coming upon each other, then standing apart and staring at each other, both waiting for the other to move or take action. Sometimes this initial meeting would lead immediately to “posturing,” greeting, or chasing (figs. 4.6 A–C). But in other instances, the two horses would stare at each other, then grab a scent in the breeze before moving in for a friendly greeting or simply trotting off with no other observable body language.

Establishing Spatial Awareness and Respect—“My Space, Your Space”

Stallion “C” is a sweet boy and lives with mares and geldings in a jumper barn. But like all smart horses and reproductively active males, he can become “pushy” and opinionated because there are decisions he wants to make that may not be aligned with what his humans want him to do in a particular moment. Ava and I worked with C in the paddock, using the following exercises to reinforce her position as leader based on the spatial awareness and respect that horses are already pre-programmed for learning (figs. 8.10 A-F). Horses in nature learn to either stand still or move as part of their social etiquette, so doing these exercises with your horse reinforces his nature to be aware, sense energy, read body language, keep eye contact, and cooperate. //

→ [8.10 A-F] Ava creates more energy around her space while maintaining eye contact and verbally tells C to “not to challenge her space.” She opens up her body and sends energy toward C so his sensitive proprioception can pick it up. Ava is using her eye contact, her voice, her body language, and her energy to clearly communicate. C understands and backs off (A).

Ava directs C to keep moving by maintaining eye contact, using her voice, opening her shoulder, and softening her energy in the direction she wants him to go, while strengthening and pushing her energy from behind to keep him moving and protect her personal space (B).

By centering and calming her energy, softening her voice, and maintaining eye contact and body language, Ava asks C to halt and stand still. Ava visualizes C standing still while gently using her voice, telling him, “Good boy.” C softens his eyes, and relaxes his ears and body language as he understands Ava’s signals (C).

Ava walks up to C to reward him with a gentle touch to the nose so he can smell her hand. She uses her voice to let him know he did exactly as she asked. Note his ear positions processing her touch and smell for recognition (D).

Ava places her hand on C’s withers, reinforcing that she is rewarding him for standing still and that they are friends (E).

She then walks away, leaving C standing still and relaxed, waiting for her next assignment (F).



A



B



C



D



E



F

are usually the teachers of this skill, but when foals do not have good moms or are weaned too soon, they often miss this—one of the most important lessons of being a horse.

Human awareness of horse awareness often goes unnoticed because horses have rhythms and their communication around spatial awareness can be subtle. You may notice it most at feeding time or if you ever walk into a polo barn full of mares. They stand resting, but then as you walk by, maybe point their ears back as acknowledgment that you moved through their space. Not wanting to wake up fully, they communicate their awareness nonetheless. Spatial respect and awareness is a basic horse skill and a simple lesson you can teach any horse, and he will feel safer and more well-adjusted once he understands it.

Keep in mind no matter what training method you use with your horse, it should follow a logical and safe path for both of you. The method must consider the horse’s emotional reaction and response, and always represent the horse’s best interests.

Many of the most dangerous horses I have worked with were simply smart horses who were annoyed at the repetitive stupidity of the person working with them, continuing to use a particular training method to get a desired response that a horse was either not able to give or felt was completely wrong from a horse’s perspective. The