



COPYRIGHT NOTICE AND TERMS OF USE

Copyright © Brooke 2015. All rights reserved. You may copy or reproduce part or all of this work but you must properly reference and credit the author using the citation below. Any unauthorised copying or use will constitute an infringement of copyright. You may not redistribute, transmit or sell all or part of this work without our express written permission. Commercial use is strictly prohibited.

CITATION

Please use the following citation to reference the content of this document:

Brown, A.F. (2015) 'Handling guidelines for welfare assessors: Best practice for safe and welfare-friendly handling of working equine animals during welfare assessment', Brooke.

<https://doi.org/10.46746gaw.2020.handl.guid.assess>



Brooke

2nd Floor
The Hallmark Building
53-56 Leadenhall Street
London EC3A 2BJ
United Kingdom

Contact: Ashleigh Brown
Email: ashleigh@thebrooke.org or
info@thebrooke.org



April 2015

Handling Guidelines For Welfare Assessors



Best practice for safe and welfare-friendly handling of working equine animals during welfare assessment.

Ashleigh F. Brown

<https://doi.org/10.46746gaw.2020.handl.guid.assess>

AB/04/15 V1.0

Contents

1. Introduction	Page 3
2. Be prepared!	Page 4
3. Communication	Page 6
3.1. Pressure-release concept	Page 10
3.2. Rewarding the animal	Page 13
4. Environment	Page 16
5. Danger zones of equine animals	Page 19
6. Welfare-friendly restraint	Page 20
6.1. The head-collar	Page 21
6.2. Fitting a head-collar	Page 24
6.3. Rope halters	Page 28
6.4. Human safety considerations	Page 30
6.5. Restraining foals	Page 31
7. Tying	Page 32
8. Leading and manoeuvring	Page 35
8.1. Moving forwards	Page 37
8.2. Pivoting and turning	Page 39
8.3. Stopping (halting)	Page 44
8.4. Moving backwards	Page 46
9. Opening the mouth	Page 48
10. Looking under the belly	Page 53
11. Picking up a fore limb	Page 58
12. Lifting the tail	Page 63
13. Dealing with challenging behaviour	Page 68
14. Species-specific advice	Page 76

Acknowledgement: Many thanks to Jayney Caspar for assistance with formatting of these guidelines.

Tip 6: Avoidance by donkeys

Donkeys tend to avoid handling that they find unpleasant by trying to escape forwards; either by charging or pushing forwards (Figure 37), or by jumping upwards and forwards at the same time. Therefore, when handling donkeys, you should anticipate this behavioural response and make sure that the donkey and any people are not in a position to be injured if the donkey rushes or leaps forwards.



Figure 37. The donkey is trying to avoid the handler by pushing forwards. The handler is positioned safely and is trying to reassure the donkey by stroking the neck.

Tip 7: Avoidance by horses

Horses tend to avoid handling that they find unpleasant by trying to escape backwards; either by walking/running backwards (Figure 38), or by rearing up on the hind limbs. Therefore, when handling horses, you should anticipate this behavioural response and make sure that the horse and any people are not in a position to be injured if the horse rushes backwards or rears.



Figure 38. The horse is rushing backwards away from the vet, because the horse finds the handling unpleasant.

Tip 4: Calming horses

Horses usually respond very well to touch, and are particularly sensitive to the manner in which they are touched. Therefore, a gentle rub on a 'safe' part of the body, such as the neck or forehead (Figure 34) can be very effective to relax horses and reassure them that you are not a threat.



Figure 34. Many horses enjoy being rubbed on the forehead.

Tip 5: Calming foals

Foals particularly enjoy the sensation of grooming along the mane, neck and withers. You can mimic the grooming of another equine animal by scratching these areas with your fingers (Figure 35). This relaxes foals and reassures them that you are not a threat. Remember that foals may try to groom you too by nibbling at your clothes or body (Figure 36). This is not an attempt to bite and should not be punished. If you want to avoid this, keep your body out of reach of the foal's mouth.



Figure 36. The handler is scratching the foal's mane with her fingers, and the foal is trying to groom the handler in return by nibbling her clothes.



Figure 35. Foals enjoy being scratched along the mane and neck.

1. Introduction

The ability to handle equine animals in a safe and welfare-friendly manner is essential to be able to collect welfare assessment data. During welfare assessment, you have responsibility for the animal's safety, your own safety, and that of other people assisting you; therefore it is important that you have a sufficient level of knowledge, skills and confidence in equine handling.

Good handling skills will enable you to:

- conduct your work without compromising animal welfare
- conduct your work with minimal risk of injury to yourself and other people
- conduct your work smoothly and efficiently in minimal time
- enjoy your work more as you will feel comfortable and confident when handling.

The purpose of this guide is to support and reinforce your practical handling training, by providing a reminder of what you learned. It is **not** a substitute for practical training, and should not be used as such. Please refer to this guide periodically to refresh your memory.

Please do not put yourself in a position of stress, fear or danger. If you do not feel confident to handle a particular animal or perform a particular task, seek assistance from a more experienced and confident colleague. Conversely, if you are able to assist less confident colleagues, take the time to help and encourage them.

Remember that you have a valuable opportunity to set a good example to all people who observe you during your work (animal owners/users, community members, local service providers, colleagues etc.). Even when your focus is on collecting data, you can teach and influence others just by demonstrating your skills in welfare-friendly handling.

It takes a long time to develop excellent equine handling skills and there is always scope for further improvement; do not feel discouraged if you cannot do everything straight away. Practice your handling skills whenever you have the opportunity, as this is how you will improve. Always be patient with the animals.

Feel free to contact me with any questions at: ashleigh@thebrooke.org .

Best regards,

Ashleigh Brown.

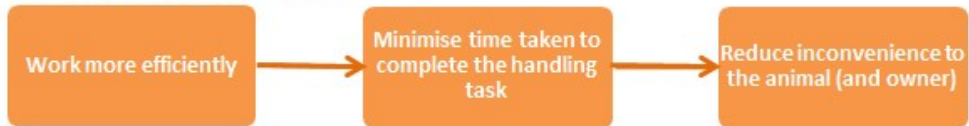
Ashleigh Brown
Welfare Assessment Advisor



2. Be prepared!

It is important that both you and any equipment or resources you require are prepared before beginning any handling task.

Being well prepared enables you to:



Advice for being prepared

- Have a plan! Know what you are going to do, and how you are going to do it, **before** you begin any handling task.
- Ensure that any people who will help you with the task are nearby and ready, e.g. data recorder, other handler, owner etc. (Figure 1).
- Have any necessary equipment/resources (e.g. head-collar, lead-rope, hoof-pick, lesion tools, etc.) ready and organised before you approach the animal (Figure 2). Also make sure you know how to use your equipment before you begin handling. If you have forgotten or are not sure, ask for help from a more experienced colleague.
- Check that there is nothing in your pockets that will restrict your movement, or will fall out if you bend over, especially in breast pockets (Figure 3).
- Check that there is nothing in the pockets of your trousers that could scratch or press into the animal if you stand close or the animal leans against you (Figure 4).

Tip 2: Catching and holding donkeys without a head-collar

The easiest way to catch or restrain a donkey before putting on a head-collar or halter is to put your arm closest to the animal gently but firmly around the neck and hold the donkey close to your body (Figure 32). Take care not to press on the windpipe as this will restrict breathing. This enables you to restrain the donkey safely without causing pain or discomfort until you are able to use the head-collar or halter.



Figure 32. The handler is holding a donkey safely until a head-collar/ halter can be fitted.

Tip 3: Calming donkeys

Donkeys generally like to lean gently against something (remember their natural instinct is to push into pressure). Therefore it can help to calm donkeys and encourage them to stand still to allow them to lean against you, if they choose.

Putting your free hand over the neck can also help to calm the donkey (as you can gently stroke the neck) and discourage the donkey from moving away from you (Figure 33).



Figure 33. The handler is allowing the donkey to gently lean against her. She is also using her left hand to stroke the donkey's neck, helping to relax and steady the donkey.

14. Species-specific advice

All equine animals are individuals with their own personality and experiences, so you should not make assumptions about how they may or may not behave if you are not familiar with that particular animal. However, there are some general trends for particular groups of equids that have been identified by experienced handlers within the Brooke. Based on these trends, here are some handling tips that may be helpful to try with particular groups of equids. Remember, these are not definitive and may not apply to every animal of the same group.

Tip 1: Handling mules

Mules have a tendency to be quick to react and difficult to reassure. They seem less likely to be relaxed by techniques that are effective with the other species, and are less likely to settle during handling if uncomfortable or tense. Therefore, when handling mules it is particularly important to work efficiently and smoothly, and aim to achieve your task in the shortest time and with minimal attempts. Do not be too tentative, as this is likely to make the mules more nervous too, but be aware that mules can react very quickly and can kick forwards, sideways and backwards.



Figure 1. Handler and assessor are both prepared and attentive. The handler (right) has the head-collar and lead-rope well organised in his hands before beginning to fit it; the assessor (left) is ready to assist if necessary.

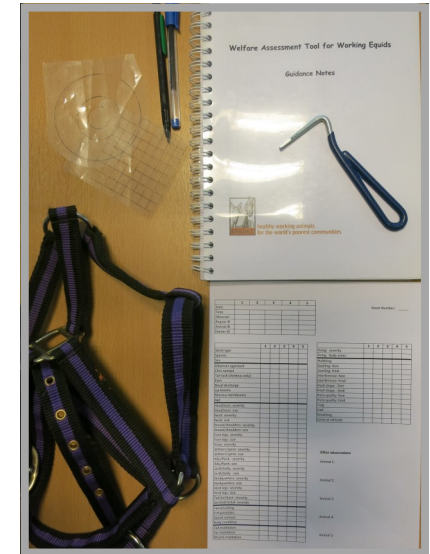


Figure 2. Equipment for welfare assessment: head-collar with lead-rope, guidance notes, data sheet, hoof-pick, measuring tools, pens.



Figure 3. Items are about to fall out of the assessor's breast pocket.

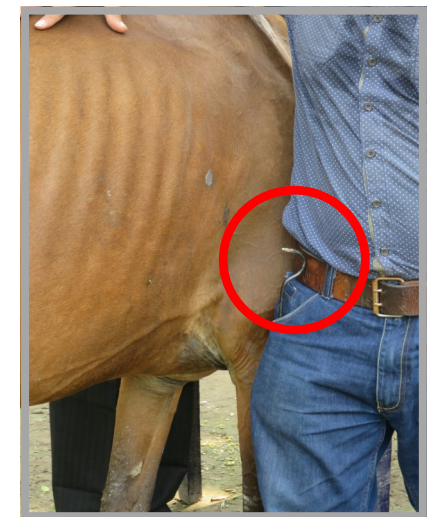


Figure 4. The hoof-pick in the assessor's pocket may press into the animal.

3. Communication

Communication from human to animal

Always remember that equine animals are prey species and humans are predators. Any human behaviour which is threatening or frightening to the animal will make handling more difficult, and therefore require more time to complete your task. The table below shows methods through which humans can communicate with equine animals. All of these communication methods can be used in combination with each other when working with equine animals.

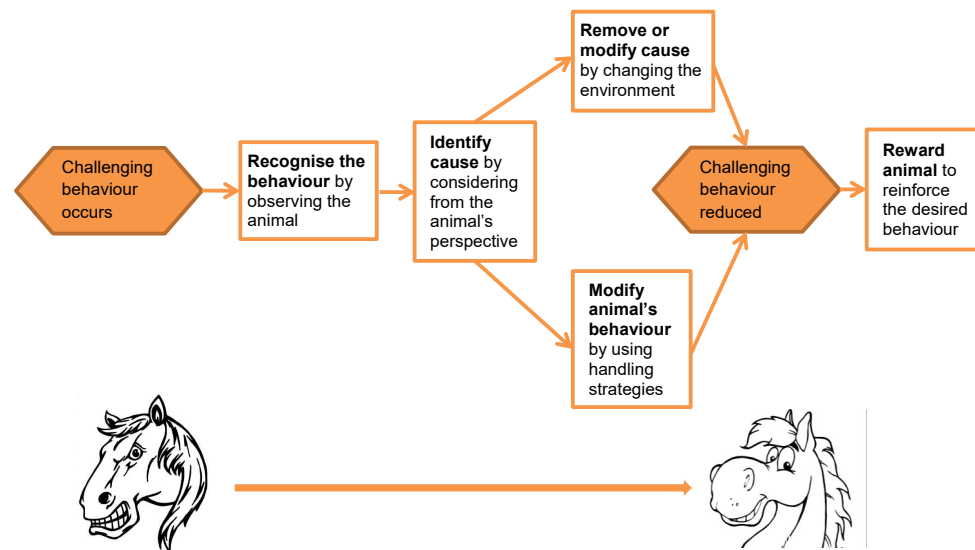
	Method	Advice	Reason
1	Vocalisation	Speak in a soft, calm voice when handling. The words are not important – it is the tone of voice that matters.	Equine animals usually respond well to the voice. A calm voice helps to reassure the animal that there is nothing to be afraid of and you are not a danger. Using your voice also helps the animal be aware of your position when you are out of sight.
2	Movement	Movement around the animal should always be calm, steady and deliberate, and not too rushed nor too hesitant. Sudden movements should be avoided.	Moving too slowly may mimic a predator 'creeping' or may suggest to the animal that you are nervous. Moving too quickly or suddenly may frighten the animal and trigger the startle or flight response.
3	Touch/pressure	Use gentle but firm medium pressure when touching equine animals.	Very light pressure appears to 'tickle' equine animals, and they will often respond by twitching the skin and moving. Very light pressure may suggest to the animal that you are nervous, which may cause the animal to become nervous too. Very strong pressure may cause pain or discomfort, which may make the animal afraid of being handled.

Step 4

Reward the animal when s/he performs the desired behaviour. Equine animals can quickly learn what is being asked of them when clear signals and rewards are used correctly. This makes handling easier for animals and handlers.

A good understanding of equine behaviour is of great importance when addressing challenging behaviour, because this helps you to correctly identify how the animal is feeling, and respond quickly to the signals the animal is giving. You can improve your ability to predict, and therefore avoid, challenging behaviour by gaining experience of handling many different equine animals in different situations. This will help you gain deep understanding of how equine animals respond to certain triggers, and why they respond in such a way. Therefore, you will become able to make a quick appraisal of the animal and situation even before handling, and can minimise challenging behaviour before it begins.

Understanding the reason for challenging behaviour is the key to resolving it.



Step 3

Take action to address the challenging behaviour. There are two main strategies:

- a) Modify the environment. Make changes to reduce the causes that you have identified in Step 2. In order to reduce the challenging behaviour, you must reduce its cause.
- b) Modify the animal's behaviour. Use your handling skills and techniques to influence the animal, e.g. to calm the animal (Figure 31).



Figure. 31. A calm and relaxed handler leads to a calm and relaxed horse. The handler's behaviour is relaxed and non-threatening. There is no pressure on the head-collar and lead-rope; the handler is gently stroking the horse's neck.

	Method	Advice	Reason
4	Eye contact	Avoid making direct eye contact if possible, particularly when approaching the animal.	Direct eye contact can be intimidating because it mimics the behaviour of dominant and threatening animals. Therefore, this can cause fear, and the animal may try to avoid you.
5	Demeanour	Always handle equine animals in a calm and relaxed manner, with patience and confidence (Figure 5). Breathe deeply and calmly. If you feel nervous or impatient, take some time to relax before proceeding.	Equine animals are sensitive and can often detect and respond to the mood of handlers. Taking deep breaths or sighing can encourage the animal to relax and do the same. An aggressive or impatient demeanour may frighten the animal, making handling more difficult. A nervous or hesitant demeanour may suggest that there is something to be afraid of as the animal may detect the fear in the human.



Figure 5. The assessor's demeanour is relaxed and confident, and he is touching the donkey with gentle but firm pressure. The donkey looks relaxed and comfortable.

Communication between handler and welfare assessor

Sometimes you may be handling the animal for another person to assess; other times you may be assessing the animal whilst another person handles. In both cases it is important that all people involved in handling communicate well with each other and work as a team (Figure 6). This is for the safety of both the handler and the assessor.

When you are <u>assessing or handling</u> - aspects to communicate to each other	Pay careful attention to the animal's behaviour at all times, and use the behavioural signals from the animal to help you anticipate likely actions.
	Always speak clearly and calmly to each other when working around the animal.
	Inform the other person if you feel unwell or unable to handle the animal for any reason.
	Check that the other person is ready or if they need more time to ensure that they and the animal are comfortable before proceeding.
When you are <u>assessing</u> - aspects to communicate to the person handling the animal	Tell the handler when you are going to perform any task that may disturb the animal and cause it to react, e.g. picking up the tail.
	Ask the handler to change their position according to the task you will do.
	Ask the handler to loosen or tighten their hold on the lead-rope if you feel adjustments are necessary.
When you are <u>handling</u> - aspects to communicate to the person assessing the animal	Warn the assessor if you think the animal may act aggressively (based on your observations of the animal's behaviour).
	Tell the assessor if you think that the animal is experiencing pain or discomfort and that the assessor should avoid any particular actions, or should stop the assessment.
	Warn the assessor if you see something in the surrounding environment which may frighten the animal.
	Tell the assessor if you need to pause or stop so that you can adjust your position, calm the animal, move the animal, adjust the head-collar, or any other reason.

Addressing challenging behaviour

When challenging behaviour occurs, taking the time to do the following process will make handling much safer and more pleasant for both the animals and humans involved.

Step 1

Recognise the behaviour being shown by the animal and the challenges this poses to your handling task. The earlier you identify that the animal is feeling uncomfortable or unhappy about the handling situation, the quicker you can rectify this before the challenging behaviour worsens and becomes more difficult. Attempting to progress when the animal is communicating that there is a problem leads to a greater risk to your safety, and a negative experience for the animal.

Remember that behaviour is the animal's way of communicating with you. Challenging behaviour gives you important information about how the animal feels – do not ignore it.

Step 2

Identify the cause of the challenging behaviour.

- Firstly, identify how the animal feels. The root cause is most likely to be one of those previously described - fear, pain/discomfort, excitement, distress/frustration (however, there may sometimes be other causes to consider).
- Secondly, identify what is making the animal feel this way. Consider the possible triggers in each specific handling context. Some aspects to think about are:
 - The animal (e.g. consider effects of previous handling experience, age, pain, discomfort, method of restraint, misunderstanding of what is happening, normal work/social situation etc.).
 - The humans (e.g. consider effects of crowding, threatening behaviour, noise, clarity of signals being given to the animal during handling, impatience, calmness etc.).
 - The surrounding area (e.g. consider effects of space, noise, distractions, unfamiliarity, traffic, crowds, other animals etc.).

4. Cause of challenging behaviour: **DISTRESS OR FRUSTRATION**

Reason	The animal is prevented from performing a behaviour that s/he is highly motivated to do.
Consequences	<p>A distressed animal may show restlessness, tension, vocalisation, escape attempts, attempts to seek comfort (usually with other equine animals).</p> <p>A frustrated animal may show restlessness, tension, pulling, pawing, head-shaking, escape attempts, attempts to reach desired place or resource.</p>
Some examples	<p>Foals separated from their mothers and vice versa – may become distressed and attempt to reach each other.</p> <p>Animals isolated from others – may be strongly motivated to re-join others (herd instinct).</p> <p>Animals wanting to eat, drink, move – may pull towards the desired place.</p> <p>Animals subject to unnecessarily slow or prolonged handling procedures – may have increased frustration.</p> <p>Animals subject to unclear or conflicting handling signals - this is confusing and may cause distress.</p>
How to respond	<p>Identify the likely source of distress or frustration – what does the animal want?</p> <p>Minimise the source by modifying the handling environment.</p> <p>Speak to the animal in a soft, calm voice if distressed.</p> <p>Permit the animal to do the desired behaviour if it is safe to do so (e.g. move a foal closer to the mother, allow the animal to eat a little if there is no reason not to).</p> <p>Always prepare sufficiently so that handling tasks can be conducted in minimal time, to avoid frustration developing and minimise the period of any distress.</p>



Figure 6. The handlers are communicating with each other calmly and their demeanour is relaxed. Although looking at each other, handlers are still communicating with the horse as well; note that both are gently touching the horse with one hand, to calm and reassure her.

3.1. Pressure-release concept

Equine animals' natural instinct is to push/pull into pressure rather than move away from it. They are taught to move away from pressure when being trained for human use; however, in times of panic, are likely to revert back to their natural instinct. This is the reason that equine animals should never be tied to anything unbreakable (as explained in Section 6). Foals and young-stock may not yet have learned to move away from pressure, therefore it is particularly important to remember this when handling them.

Equine animals will learn to move away from pressure if they are rewarded by a release of this pressure when they make the correct movement. This is the basis of the pressure-release concept.

For example, if you use the head-collar to apply gentle pressure backwards to the nose to ask the animal to stop, and the animal responds by stopping, this behaviour should be rewarded immediately by releasing the pressure on the nose. By rewarding in this way, the animal learns what is being asked without the use of fear or force, and the desired behavioural response is reinforced (Figures 7 and 8).



Figure 7. Pressure applied on lead-rope when animal pulls forwards (undesired behaviour).



Figure 8. Pressure released on lead-rope when animal stands still (desired behaviour).

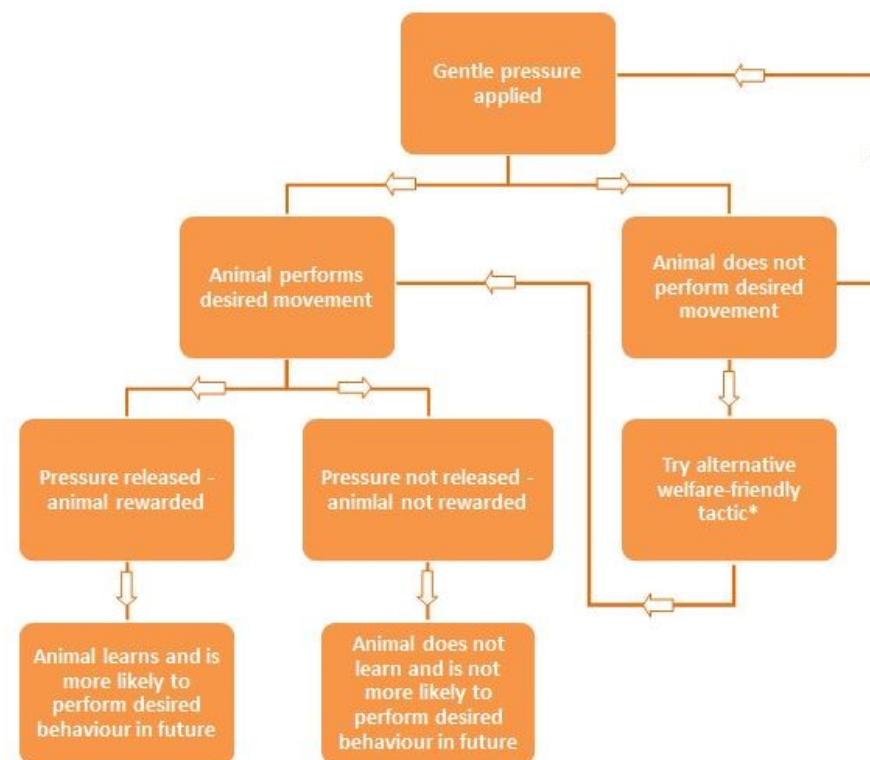
3. Cause of challenging behaviour: EXCITEMENT

Reason	The animal perceives something in the environment as very interesting and stimulating.
Consequences	<p>The animal may pull against the handler while trying to reach the source of excitement (often other equine animals).</p> <p>The animal may show play behaviour directed towards other animals or human handlers, such as pulling, pushing, rearing, play-fighting, bucking etc., but not accompanied by genuine aggression.</p>
Some examples	<p>Stallions around mares.</p> <p>Young animals – can be particularly excitable and playful.</p> <p>Unfamiliar animals mixing together.</p> <p>Animals not in regular work or exercise with excess energy.</p> <p>Animals moved from their usual place to new surroundings.</p> <p>Animals released from confinement.</p>
How to respond	<p>Make the distinction between aggression and excitement. Excited animals are not trying to threaten you.</p> <p>Identify the likely causes of excitement from the animal's perspective. Is there something unusual and stimulating about the current setting?</p> <p>Allow the animal some time to calm down before beginning handling tasks.</p> <p>Speak to the animal in a soft, calm voice.</p> <p>Minimise sources of excitement in the environment (e.g. move the animal to a calmer place, restrain nearby animals).</p> <p>Encourage the animal to focus on you rather than other distractions by giving clear handling signals. This helps to gain the animal's attention and avoid you being hurt accidentally.</p> <p>Use the 'pressure and release' technique to help control an animal that is pulling strongly.</p>

2. Cause of challenging behaviour: PAIN OR DISCOMFORT

Reason	The animal experiences pain or physical discomfort which may be exacerbated or prolonged during handling.
Consequences	<p>The animal may show restlessness, avoidance, refusal to perform some handling tasks, or aggression.</p> <p>The animal may try to protect a painful area, or attempt to prevent worsening of pain or discomfort by avoiding particular handling tasks.</p>
Some examples	<p>Animals with localised pain – may show avoidance or aggression when a particular part of the body is touched.</p> <p>Lame animals – may refuse to walk or pick up a limb.</p> <p>Animals uncomfortably harnessed – may be restless, changing their position often.</p> <p>Animals with generalised pain – may be over-sensitive or aggressive in response to touch.</p> <p>Animals in discomfort associated with the environment - may be restless, e.g. moving the head, limbs and tail to remove flies.</p>
How to respond	<p>Observe the animal's behaviour, posture and body for signs of pain in any body part before handling.</p> <p>Identify the likely sources of pain or discomfort, and try to reduce them.</p> <p>Be careful not to exacerbate pain or discomfort during handling; modify your handling to avoid painful areas.</p> <p>Do not ask the animal to do anything which will exacerbate its pain or discomfort for the purposes of welfare assessment.</p> <p>Make the animal more comfortable (e.g. remove unnecessary harnessing, move into shade etc.).</p>

The release of pressure is the reward which encourages repetition of the desired behaviour in future. If the pressure is not released, and therefore the animal is not rewarded for performing the desired behaviour, then the animal will not become more likely to perform the desired behaviour again in future. This is summarised in the flow chart below.



*If the animal does not perform the desired movement after you have asked several times, reassess the situation and try to identify the reason why the animal is not co-operating. Refer to Section 13 for further information on possible reasons to consider. You may need to change something in the environment or ask the animal in a different way.

Some rules to remember...

- Before asking animals to make any movement, always make sure that they are able to do what you will ask, and that you are helping to make it as easy as possible. Consider:
 - Does the animal have enough space?
 - Is the animal's movement restrained somehow?
 - Is the animal injured or in pain?
 - Is the animal frightened or distressed?
- Begin with the minimum amount of pressure to ask the animal to move, and repeat or increase slightly if necessary. Beginning with too much pressure may frighten the animal or compromise welfare.
- Give the animal time to understand and respond to what you are asking before you repeat or slightly increase the pressure.
- If the animal does not understand and respond to what you are asking, try asking in a different, welfare-friendly way.
- Never apply pressure when the animal is already doing the desired behaviour. This gives an unclear message, and makes it difficult for the animal to understand what you are asking.
- Release the pressure straight away when the animal performs the desired behaviour.
- Do not apply pressure when it is not necessary (i.e. if you are not asking the animal to do something). Allow the animal to relax when possible (Figure 9).
- Remember that equine animals will not be completely still for long. It is normal that they need to move occasionally, e.g. to shift weight, turn the head, scratch, shake away flies etc., and you should permit this during handling.



Figure 9. The handler has no pressure on the lead-rope because there is no need to ask the animal to do anything at this time. He has allowed the animal to relax, but is still attentive and standing in a safe position.

Causes of challenging behaviour

The reasons for challenging behaviour vary depending on the animal and the context, but some of the most common causes in working equine animals are shown in the tables below.

1. Cause of challenging behaviour: FEAR	
Reason	The animal perceives something or someone in the environment as threatening.
Consequences	The animal may wish to perform the 'flight' response; if unable to do so, may resort to the 'fight' response. Therefore, fear often leads to avoidance or aggressive behaviours.
Some examples	<p>Animals beaten or mistreated by humans – may be fearful of human proximity.</p> <p>Animals unfamiliar with handling or particular handling tasks.</p> <p>Animals with negative previous experience associated with a particular handling task (e.g. memory of ear pulling leads to animal afraid of ears being touched).</p> <p>Animals with negative previous experience associated with a particular aspect of the environment (e.g. large trucks, vet in white coat, etc.).</p> <p>Animals intimidated by the surroundings (e.g. crowds of people).</p>
How to respond	<p>Identify the likely sources of fear and try to reduce them.</p> <p>Speak to the animal in a soft, calm voice.</p> <p>Reassure the animal through positive physical interactions.</p> <p>Behave confidently during handling; equids may sense anxiety and become more afraid.</p>

13. Dealing with challenging behaviour

Introduction

Handling equine animals can sometimes be challenging, and may not always go smoothly. It is important that you can adapt your behaviour and handling response to suit different animals and situations. The more you practice handling a wide range of equine animals, the better your handling skills and confidence will become. Remember that equine behaviours which present challenges to humans are not usually abnormal, but are normal behaviours based on equine animals' natural instincts. These behaviours only present challenges for humans because we want to do unnatural things to the animals.

Remember! The priority in all handling is the safety and welfare of the animals and people involved. Seek assistance from more experienced colleagues if you do not feel able to handle any animal.



3.2. Rewarding the animal

Rewarding the animal is how we say 'thank you'. It is important to provide some form of reward when the animal performs the desired behaviour because this teaches the animal what is the right or wrong response. Reinforcing the correct response makes handling easier, both at that time and in the future. The most appropriate type of reward to use will depend on what is feasible to do in the particular handling situation, and different rewards can be used together in combination. There are two main principles for rewarding: **giving something pleasant**, and **removing something unpleasant**.

1. Give something pleasant

Some examples:

- **Positive physical interaction.** A gentle stroke on the neck (Figure 10), rub of the face/forehead, or scratch of the mane area are often pleasant for equine animals. Take care to avoid touching any injuries.
- **Positive vocal interaction.** Speaking in a soft, calm voice can be comforting to equine animals. This can easily be used to accompany other forms of reward.
- **Edible reward.** In some cases food can be used as a method of reward. For example, you could consider allowing the animal to graze when this does not affect your assessment (Figure 11). It is generally not a good idea to feed equine animals from your hand, as this is unnatural and may encourage them to bite.
- **Behavioural freedom.** Offering the opportunity to stretch, scratch, rest or move can be used intermittently to reward desirable behaviour during welfare assessment. Similarly, offering the opportunity to roll, play, interact with other equids, or express other forms of natural, desirable behaviours could be used as rewards at the end of the handling process.



Figure 10. Stroking gently on the neck.



Figure 11. Allowing the animal to graze when safe to do so.

2. Remove something unpleasant

Some examples:

- **Release of pressure.** This applies during handling (Figure 12), leading and manoeuvring for welfare assessment, but is also a key principle during driving, riding or training of equine animals. Refer to Section 2.1 for more information about the pressure-release concept.
- **Removal of discomfort** associated with particular handling tasks. When the animal performs the correct behaviour, do not persist with any uncomfortable task longer than necessary. For example, if the animal calmly picks up the hoof, do not hold the hoof up longer than necessary to complete the task; reward the animal's desirable behaviour by replacing the hoof quickly. If you need to conduct an uncomfortable task for longer, reward the animal by giving rest breaks; for example if the hoof needs to be picked up for more than a few minutes, allow the animal to replace it to the ground for a rest break and to rebalance, then pick the hoof up again to continue the task.
- **Removal of restraint.** Reward desirable behaviour by removing any methods of restraint promptly, and not restraining the animal's movement longer or to a greater extent than necessary to conduct the handling tasks. (This is linked with the 'behavioural freedom' example on the previous page, since by removing restraint you remove something unpleasant and provide something pleasant at the same time.)

Remember, 'something unpleasant' does not only mean strong pain or extreme force. Any extent of restraint, pressure or discomfort still have the potential to be unpleasant for the animal.



Figure 12. The handler has released the pressure on the lead-rope, thus rewarding the animal for performing the desired behaviour, and minimising discomfort.

Step 6

Action:

Thank the animal.

Reason:

- Rewarding the animal reassures that you are not a danger, reinforces desirable behaviour shown by the animal, and therefore makes it more likely that the animal will be unafraid and behave calmly during future handling.



Step 4

Action:

Run your hand approximately half-way down the dock (tail bone) before trying to pick up the tail. Wrap your fingers around the dock and gently lift the tail; do not pull the hair. Do not lift the tail any higher than horizontal.

Reason:

- It is easier to lift the tail from half-way down the dock than to pull from the top.
- Pulling the hair or lifting the tail excessively high may cause discomfort to the animal, which compromises welfare and makes handling more difficult.



Step 5

Action:

When you have made your observations, gently return the tail to its natural position; do not drop it suddenly. Then step back towards the head of the animal.

Reason:

- Dropping the tail may be uncomfortable for the animal.
- Stepping back to the head moves you away from the hind limbs danger zone, while still being able to watch them.



Accidentally reinforcing undesired behaviour

Remember that 'rewards' can be used wrongly, with the effect of reinforcing undesired behaviour rather than desired behaviour. During handling, take care that you do not accidentally reward an animal for performing an undesired behaviour. If you do so, the undesired behaviour will increase.

Case study

Scenario:

- The donkey tried to kick you when you placed your hand on the hindquarters.
- As a result of this kick threat you removed your hand, and stepped away from the hindquarters.
- You have therefore rewarded the animal for kicking.
- The animal learns that a kick threat is a good way to get a human to remove their hand from the hindquarters and move away.

Correct response:

- When the donkey tries to kick, keep your hand gently but firmly on the hindquarters. Make sure your body is positioned safely to the side of the hindquarters (Figure 13), but do not step far away from the animal.
- When the donkey accepts your hand without threatening to kick, reward her, e.g. by removing your hand and providing positive physical interaction such as gently stroking the neck.
- Repeat this process until the donkey calmly accepts your hand on the hindquarters each time without kicking. This may take several attempts.
- The donkey learns that calmly accepting the hand on the hindquarters leads to a reward, but threatening to kick does not. She also learns that the hand on the hindquarters did not have negative consequences, so she does not need to be afraid about it next time.
- Now you can continue with your original handling task more easily, and it will also be easier next time.



Figure 13. The assessor is positioned safely to the side of the hindquarters.

4. Environment

Introduction

Before and during handling, it is important to consider possible welfare risks in the surrounding environment. Some aspects of the environment may change during the handling period, so you should always **stay aware** of the surroundings, **re-evaluate** any welfare risks, and **take action** to reduce risks in order to maintain a safe handling environment for the animal and yourself. The **ICE** model can help you evaluate welfare risks during handling.

Think **ICE**
- and look carefully!



Injury

- Consider whether there are any injury risks to the animal.
- Could the animal be injured by anything during the handling process or something in the surrounding environment?

Examples of risks to consider:

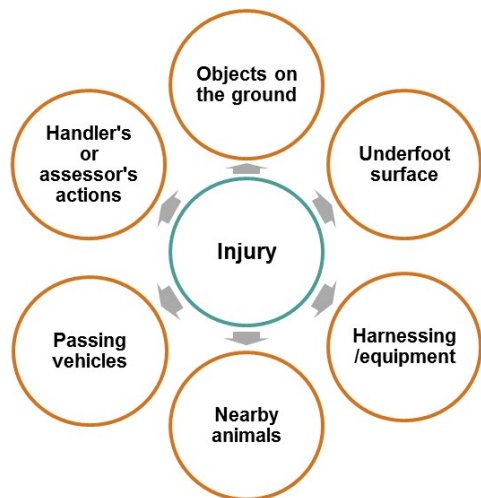


Figure 14. A safe working area. The ground and surrounding area is clear and safe and there is plenty of space to work safely.

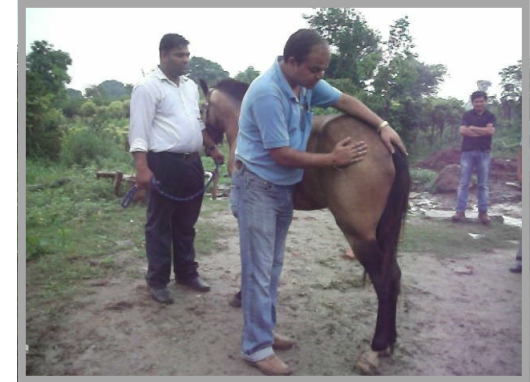
Step 3

Action:

When your hand reaches the tail, keep your body positioned to the side of the animal's hindquarters.

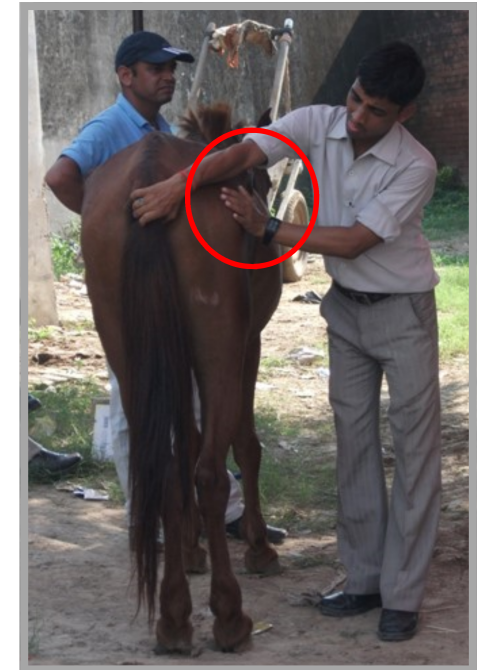
Reason:

- This is the safest position to avoid being injured if the animal kicks.



Note: You may wish to use your other hand (furthest away from the animal) on the hindquarters. This can be useful because it:

- Enables you to stroke the animal which can be reassuring to it.
- Enables you to feel and anticipate that the animal may kick due to feeling the muscle tension in the hindquarters.
- Enables you to protect yourself if the animal kicks, since this hand can maintain distance between your body and the kicking limb.
- Helps to support your own balance.



Step 1

Action:

Position your body correctly. Stand close to the animal's shoulder, facing towards the animal's tail. The handler should be on the **same** side of the animal.

Reason:

- Having the handler on the same side is safer if the animal tries to turn around or kick, because the animal is more likely to turn away from the handler rather than towards him/her.



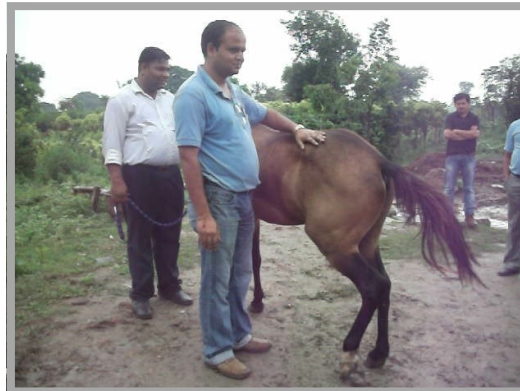
Step 2

Action:

Using the hand closest to the animal, gently move your hand along the animal's body towards the hindquarters. Do not put your hand on any lesions, swellings or on the spine. Only progress further when the animal is comfortable with the point you have reached.

Reason:

- Gradually moving your hand down along the body lets the animal know that you are moving towards the tail, so there is no sudden surprise.
- Allowing time for the animal to accept your hand before moving further reduces the chance that this animal will resist.



Comfort

- Consider whether the animal is as comfortable as possible.
- Is the animal likely to be experiencing physical or thermal discomfort?

Examples of aspects to consider:

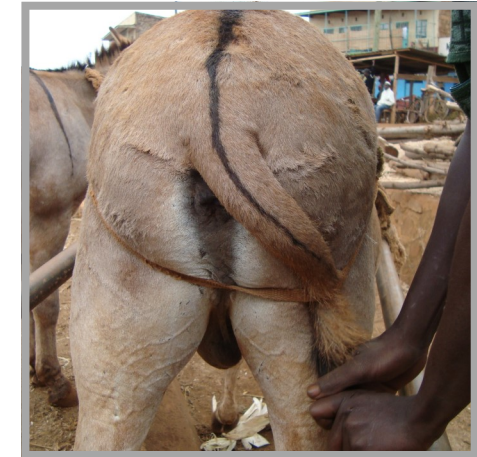
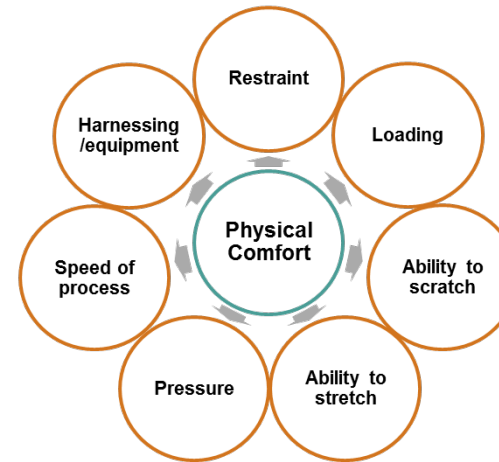


Figure 15. The tight rope around the hindquarters and tail is likely to cause physical discomfort.

Examples of aspects to consider:

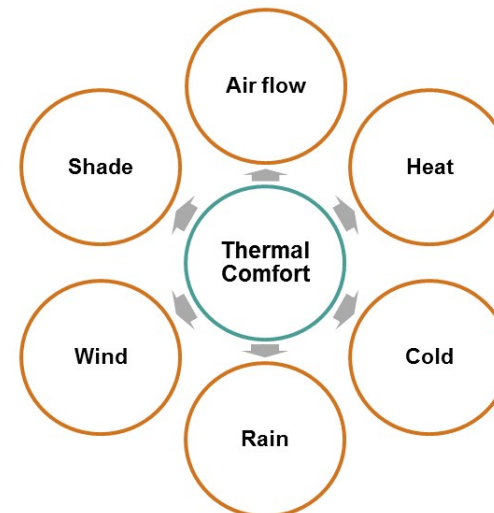


Figure 16. Using shade from a tree reduces thermal discomfort.

Emotion

- Consider the animal's emotional experience of the event.
- Is the animal likely to be experiencing any unpleasant feelings?

Examples of aspects to consider:



Figure 17. The animal's behaviour is fearful and anxious. The muzzle, jaw and neck muscles are tense, the ears are back, the whites of eyes are showing, and the animal is pulling strongly against the lead-rope.

Figure 18. This animal's behaviour is content and calm. The muscles of the face and neck are not tense, the ears are forward, and the animal is not pulling against the lead-rope.



12. Lifting the tail

Introduction

During welfare assessment it may be necessary to lift the tail to observe the area for ectoparasites, tail/tail base lesions and genital/rectal lesions.

Before attempting to lift the tail for any reason, it is important to observe the hindquarters, hind limbs and tail area for any obvious injuries or swelling which may cause further pain to the animal if touched. Remember that an injury may make the animal more sensitive and nervous about being touched in these areas, so you should proceed with caution and avoiding touching the area close to any injury.

When lifting the tail, you must work close to the hind limbs danger zone, so it is important to be attentive at all times and be prepared for any kick attempts from the animal.



Figure 30. The correct position for picking up the tail. Note the handler is on the same side of the animal as the assessor.

Step 4

Action:

When you have finished examining the hoof, gently place it back down on the ground. Do not drop it.

Reason:

- Dropping the hoof could cause discomfort to the animal as it may have pain in some part of the hoof or limb.



Step 5

Action:

Thank the animal.

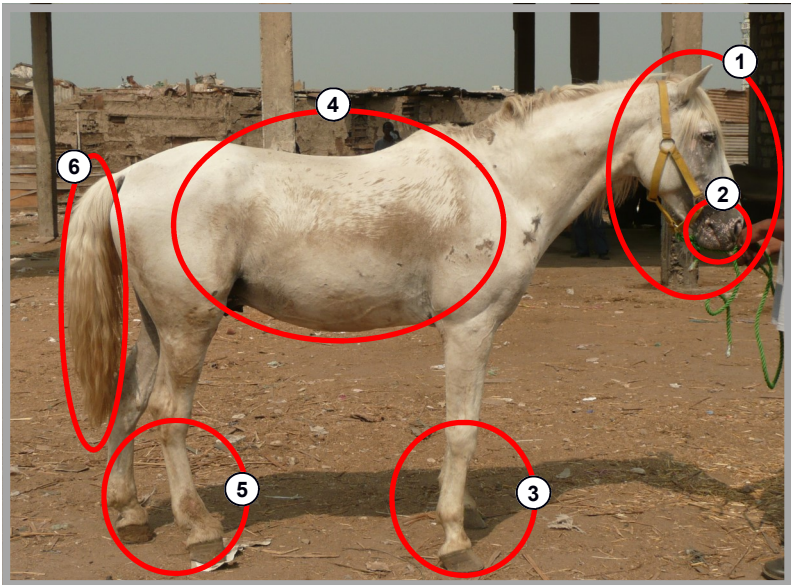
Reason:

- Rewarding the animal reassures that you are not a danger, reinforces desirable behaviour shown by the animal, and therefore makes it more likely that the animal will be unafraid and behave calmly during future handling.



5. Danger zones of equine animals

Equine animals can be large and powerful. Therefore, it is important to be aware of their potential 'danger zones' so that you can take suitable precautions to work safely and confidently. The danger zones are summarised below.



Zone		Dangers
1	Head	Butting with the side of the head, the top of the head, or the nose.
2	Teeth	Biting.
3	Fore limbs	Striking in front, pawing, stamping, kicking towards the belly, striking if animal rears, standing on toes.
4	Body/weight	Crushing against something; knocking over.
5	Hind limbs	Kicking behind, kicking to the side, kicking towards the belly, standing on toes.
6	Tail	Whipping the face or eyes.

6. Welfare-friendly restraint

Introduction

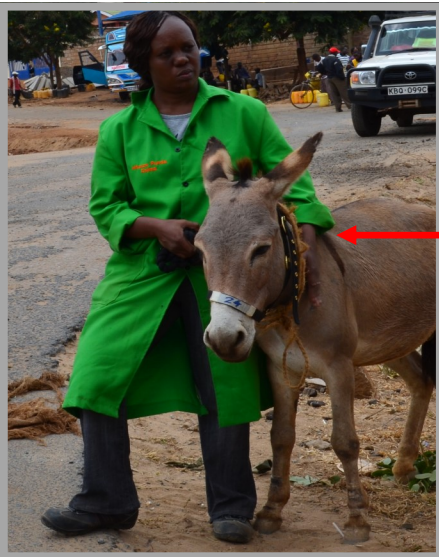
Safe and welfare-friendly restraint should always be used during equine handling. This is to ensure the comfort of the animals, the safety of the humans, and to enable the work to be completed smoothly and efficiently.

A correctly fitted head-collar or rope halter is the best method of welfare-friendly restraint because they enable the handler to control the animal's head easily and safely. Accordingly, all Brooke representatives handling equine animals in the course of their work are required to use a lead-rope and halter/head-collar of appropriate size and fit for the animal (foals the exception).

It is acceptable to use the animal's own equipment during handling if it fits correctly and will not injure the animal, because changing to new equipment may be more disruptive.

If the animal is tied to anything, or has ropes tied to any part of the body, remember to untie these before handling, as extra ropes create a hazard. If the animal has rope tied to the neck or limbs and it is not possible to remove it, tie any extra rope loosely around the neck so that the animal, assessor or handler is not at risk of standing on this (Figure 19).

The restraint methods described in these guidelines are the only suitable methods to use during welfare assessment; other forms of more severe restraint should not be used.



Long rope tied loosely around the neck for safety

Figure 19. The donkey had a long rope around the neck which could not be untied. The handler has tied this loosely around the neck to avoid it trailing dangerously on the ground.

Check your position!

Advice	Reason
When holding the hoof up, support it with an open hand underneath it; do not grip tightly around the pastern.	Squeezing around the pastern may cause discomfort to the animal.
Put two fingers on the hoof wall and two fingers on the hair above the coronary band.	This enables you to support the hoof well so it does not wobble around.
Do not lift the hoof higher than the knee. The position of the lower limb should be less than horizontal. You will need to bend your knees for smaller animals, (especially if you are tall).	Working equids may have pain in the knees. Lifting the hoof high increases the bend in the knee and may cause pain.
Do not pull the limb to the side; keep it in aligned with the animal's knee.	Twisting the knee could cause pain or discomfort to the knee joint.



Step 3

Action:

When your hand has reached the pastern, gently lift the hoof up off the ground. Do not try to lift the hoof until your hand has reached the pastern (unless the animal chooses to lift the hoof sooner).

Reason:

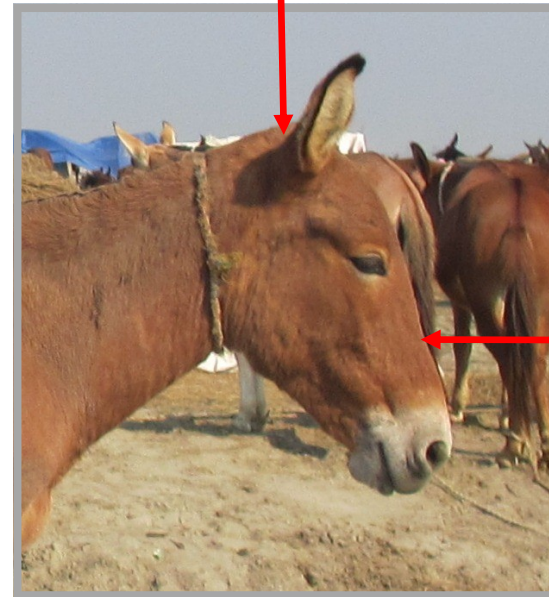
- Attempting to lift the hoof by pulling or squeezing on the tendons of the fore limb may cause pain or injury.



6.1. The head-collar

The head-collar is a piece of harnessing designed to safely control the head of the animal. The head-collar gives control over the animal's head by exerting pressure on the nose and the poll, and allowing the handler to control the direction of the head.

Pressure exerted on the poll (area behind the ears)



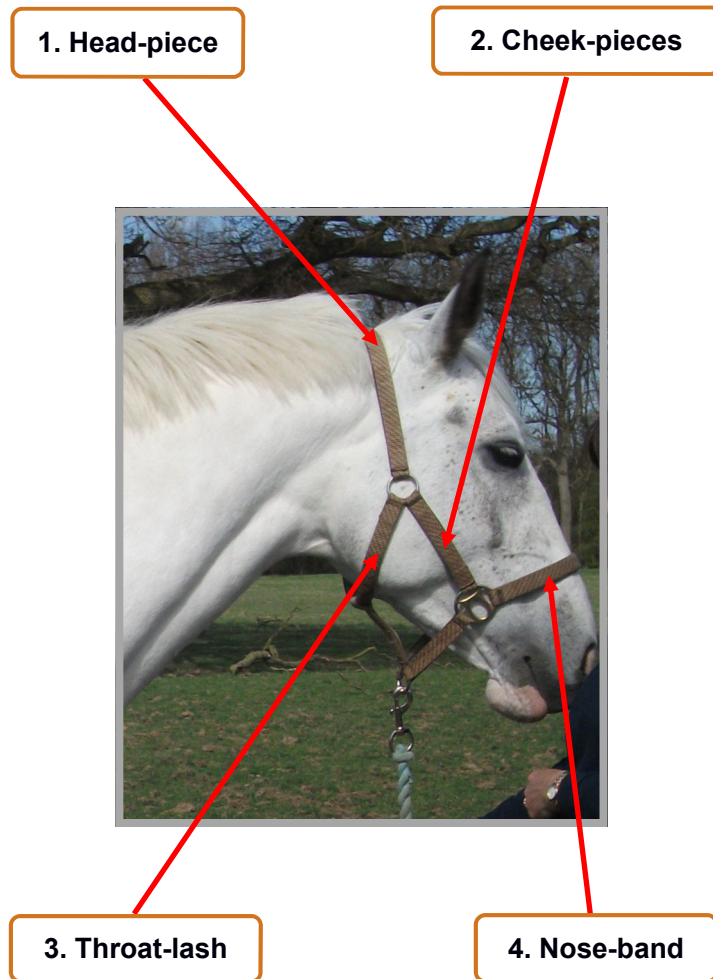
Pressure exerted on the hard part of the nose

Buckles on the head-collar should always face away from the animal's skin so they do not press into the animal and cause discomfort.

Do not tie extra knots in head-collars to make them smaller, as these large knots may cause discomfort. You can make additional holes in the head-piece or nose-band if necessary to adjust to a smaller size.

Parts of the head-collar

A head-collar has four main components, as shown below.



Step 1

Action:

Position your body correctly. Stand close to the animal's shoulder, facing towards the tail. The handler should be on the **opposite** side of the animal.

Reason:

- This is the safest position for you, and the easiest from which to pick up a fore limb in a welfare-friendly manner.



Step 2

Action:

Using the arm closest to the animal, gently and steadily slide your hand down the fore limb to the pastern. Take care to avoid touching any wounds or swellings.

Reason:

- Gradually moving your hand down the fore limb lets the animal know that you are moving towards the hoof, so there is no sudden surprise.
- Some animals may anticipate and lift the hoof themselves.
- Moving gently and steadily does not frighten the animal and avoids placing too much pressure on potentially painful limbs.



11. Picking up a fore limb

Introduction:

During welfare assessment it may be necessary to pick up fore hooves to observe the frog. It is also sometimes useful to better observe the heel and pastern area when looking for interference lesions.

Before attempting to pick up the hoof for any reason, it is important to observe the limbs for any obvious injuries, swelling or lameness which may cause further pain to the animal if the hoof is picked up. To minimise pain and discomfort to the animal:

- If there are lesions on the limbs, take care to avoid touching these when picking up the hooves.
- If the animal is obviously lame (e.g. pointing or resting a fore limb) do not try to pick up the hooves.
- If there is swelling which may restrict the movement of any joints (e.g. the knee) do not try to pick up the hooves.
- If the animal has difficulty lifting a limb when you attempt to do so, do not continue.
- Do not lift hooves longer or more times than necessary to observe what you need to. Remember to have your hoof-pick easily and quickly accessible.
- If you think that it is not possible to pick up the hooves without causing unnecessary pain to the animal, then do not proceed.



Part of the head-collar		Correct fit and position	Reason
1	Head-piece	Should be positioned directly behind the ears. Should not be positioned mid-way down the neck.	To ensure that pressure is exerted on the poll to give best control.
2	Cheek-piece	Should be of equal length and position on both sides of the face. Should not be close to the eyes.	To ensure that pressure will be applied evenly on both sides. To avoid causing discomfort or pain, or interfering with vision.
3	Throat-lash	Should have approximately four fingers' distance between the throat-lash and the animal's cheek.	To ensure that the animal can flex the head and neck comfortably without the head-collar interfering with breathing, swallowing or head movement.
4	Nose-band	Should be positioned on the solid part of the animal's nose, not on the soft cartilage. Should have approximately two fingers' distance between the nose-band and the animal's nose.	To avoid causing discomfort or pain to the nostrils, or interfering with breathing. To ensure that the animal is still able to move the mouth and jaws without restriction.

6.2. Fitting a head-collar

Step 1

Action:

Connect the lead-rope to the central ring of the nose-band of the head-collar.

Reason:

- Doing this first avoids the need to hold the animal by placing your fingers underneath the head-collar at a later stage, which can risk injury to the handler.
- Using the central ring of the nose-band means that pressure will be evenly applied over the nose and evenly downwards on the poll.



Step 2

Action:

Put the lead-rope loosely around the animal's neck. Do not allow the lead-rope to trail on the ground.

Reason:

- The lead-rope around the neck gives you a way of holding the animal before the head-collar has been fitted.
- If the animal tries to move away, you can hold on to the lead-rope to retain some control.
- Allowing the lead-rope to trail on the ground is dangerous, because it could become entangled in the animal's or handler's limbs.



Step 5

Action:

Repeat steps 1-4 on the other side of the animal.

Reason:

- It is necessary to view the belly from both sides, as you will not see the whole area clearly from only one side.
- You can observe the inside of the opposite hind limb from the other side.



Step 6

Action

Thank the animal.

Reason:

- Rewarding the animal reassures that you are not a danger, reinforces desirable behaviour shown by the animal, and therefore makes it more likely that the animal will be unafraid and behave calmly during future handling.



Check your position!

Advice	Reason
Do not put your head underneath the animal's belly.	<p>You will be unable to see what is happening around you.</p> <p>You are in danger of being injured if the animal kicks towards the belly with a fore limb or hind limb.</p>
Do not put your head close to the animal's hind limbs when bending down to observe the belly.	You are in danger of being injured if the animal kicks with a hind limb.
Keep your feet apart, not close together.	This will improve your balance.
Do not kneel on the ground to see under the belly.	You must be able to stand up quickly if you need to move away, e.g. if the animal moves suddenly.
When bending down, bend at your knees; do not keep your legs straight.	This will help your balance and enable you to move away more quickly if necessary.



Step 3

Action:

Gently put your hand closest to the animal under the head and around the nose. Your shoulder should be just in front of the animal's neck.

Reason:

- This allows you to control the position of the animal's head in order to:
 - Put the head-collar on smoothly and easily.
 - Prevent the animal from running away.
 - Protect you from any attempts by the animal to bite you.



Step 4

Action:

Gently place the nose-band of the head-collar around the nose, then pass the head-piece over the top of the head, behind the ears, and fasten it.

Reason:

- The head-collar will stay in the correct position.
- You are now able to have control over the animal's head.

Step 5

Action:

Check the fit and position of all parts of the head-collar. There should be two fingers' width between the nose-band and the nose, and four fingers' width between the throat-lash and the cheek, as shown in Figures 20 and 21.

Reason:

- Ensuring that the head-collar is correctly fitted:
- Reduces discomfort or pain to the animal during handling.
- Allows the head-collar to function properly by exerting pressure on the appropriate parts of the animal's head to provide a safe level of control.

A wrongly fitted head-collar will make it more difficult to control the animal, and can compromise animal welfare and human safety.



Figure 20. Four fingers' width between the throat-lash and cheek.



Figure 21. Two fingers' width between the nose-band and nose.



Step 3 (Observing from near)

Action:

Move closer to the animal. Position your body beside the animal's shoulder, facing towards the tail. The handler should be on the **same** side of the animal.

Reason:

- From a close position you can better investigate any abnormalities you noticed from the far position.
- From beside the shoulder you are away from the hind limbs danger zone and can observe them easily.



Step 4 (Observing from near)

Action:

Bend or crouch down enough to see under the animal's belly. You may find it useful to put the hand closest to the animal gently on the neck or shoulder, if the animal is comfortable with this.

Reason:

- You must lower your head in order to see the belly.
- A gentle hand on the neck or shoulders can help to steady the animal, and let the animal know you are there.
- The hand can also help to steady yourself if the animal moves.

Step 1 (Observing from far)

Action:

Stand approximately two metres distance from the animal. Position your body in line with the animal's shoulder, facing towards the tail. The handler can stand on either side of the animal.

Reason:

- You are a safe distance away from all danger zones.



Step 2 (Observing from far)

Action:

Bend or crouch down enough to see under the animal's belly. You will need to bend more for smaller animals than for taller ones.

Reason:

- You must lower your head to be able to see the belly.
- At the same time you can observe the inside of the hind limb on the opposite side.



Step 6

Action:

Finally, remove the lead-rope from around the animal's neck.

The animal is now safely restrained and ready for examination.



6.3. Rope halters

If a purpose-made head-collar is not available, a rope halter should be used instead. Always make sure you have rope available during field work to make a halter if necessary. Even if you have head-collars, sometimes they may not fit a particular animal correctly, therefore it may be better to make a rope halter.

Material

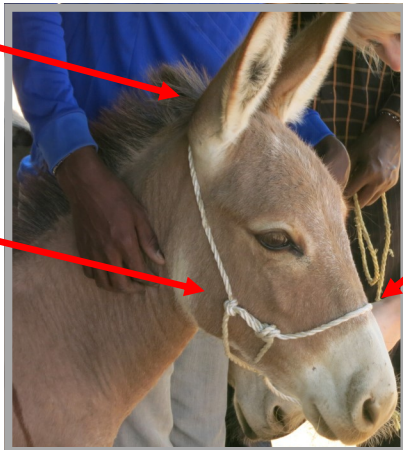
The halter should be made from soft, flexible rope of natural material if possible, because this will be more comfortable for the animal. Thicker rope is preferable to thinner rope, because thicker rope distributes pressure over a wider area rather than concentrating pressure on a small area which is more likely to cause discomfort.

Fit

There are various ways of making a rope halter, but whichever way you choose, the following three rules should apply when fitting it:

- **Component around the nose.** One component of the halter should form a loop around the animal's nose. This must always be positioned on the hard part of the nose. As with a head-collar, the size should allow two fingers' distance between the rope and the nose.
- **Component behind the ears.** One component of the halter should pass over the poll, directly behind the ears. As with a head-collar, the size should allow four fingers' distance between the rope and the cheek/throat.
- **Fixed size.** All components of the rope halter must be tied securely so that they do not tighten and become smaller in size if pressure is applied during handling.

Component
behind the ears



Component
around the nose

Fixed size (knots
tied so size does not
change during use)

10. Looking under the belly

Introduction:

During welfare assessment it is necessary to look under the belly to observe for lesions, firing and ectoparasites. At the same time you can also observe the genitals and the inside of the hind limbs to look for lesions, firing and ectoparasites in these areas too.

Some equine animals do not like being touched in this area, and the skin on the belly can be sensitive. It is not necessary to touch the skin of the belly to observe welfare assessment parameters; it should be sufficient just to look. If measuring the size of any lesions, the measuring tool should be held above the skin, not touching it.

It is good practice to observe the belly from two positions - far from, and near to, the animal. From the far position you can see whether there are any lesions, and from the near position you can measure the size of lesions and check for ectoparasites.



Figure 29. The assessor is checking a lesion on the girth area, in the correct position. Note his left hand on the horse's neck; this can be useful to let the horse know he is there and to steady the horse and himself.

Step 5

Action:

Thank the animal.

Reason:

- Rewarding the animal reassures that you are not a danger, reinforces desirable behaviour shown by the animal, and therefore makes it more likely that the animal will be unafraid and behave calmly during future handling.



Use

A make-shift rope halter is not as secure as a head-collar so is more likely to shift and change its position during use. Therefore, when using a rope halter it is particularly important to **check the fit and position of the halter frequently during handling**, and adjust this as required to ensure that all of the component parts are still in the correct place.



Figure 22. Assessors teach a donkey owner how to make a rope halter. The owner checks the fit with his fingers

Figures 23 and 24. Examples of rope halters.



6.4. Human safety considerations

Here are some precautions you should take when fitting and using a head-collar or rope halter for your own safety.

Advice	Reason	Solution
Do not lean your head or body above the animal's head when fitting the head-collar or halter.	<p>The animal may suddenly raise or shake its head and hit your face.</p> <p>Leaning over in this way may intimidate the animal.</p>	<p>Put your hands underneath or around the front of the head instead.</p> <p>Keep your head position to the side of the animal, not above.</p> <p>Move your body to the other side of the animal if you need to in order to adjust the head-collar or halter.</p>
Do not hold the animal by placing fingers underneath the head-collar or halter (between the nose-band and the animal).	Fingers could become trapped and injured if the animal moves suddenly.	<p>Always use a lead-rope along with a head-collar.</p> <p>If you need to hold onto the head-collar or halter directly, make sure that your fingers are not tightly trapped and can be removed very easily.</p>
When holding or leading the animal using a lead-rope, do not wrap the rope around your hand.	Fingers could become trapped and injured if the animal moves suddenly.	Hold the rope in the palm of your hand. Fold it if necessary to adjust the length.
Do not allow the lead-rope to trail on the ground at any time.	You or the animal may stand on it, or become entangled, causing a risk of tripping or injury to the animal or yourself.	Fold the rope if necessary to adjust the length, and hold it above the ground.

Step 3

Action:

Gently place both thumbs inside the lips, then separate the lips so that you can see the mucous membranes or teeth. Do not open the lips any more than is necessary to see the relevant structure.

Reason:

- Using the thumbs enables you to keep some control over the head with the rest of the hand.
- The hands can be steadied against the animal's head, therefore are more controlled if the animal moves the head suddenly so as to not to injure the lips.



Step 4

Action:

If you need to open the jaws and separate the upper and lower teeth (e.g. to see the tables of the teeth), place your thumbs in the diastema (the space between the teeth) and apply gentle pressure with the thumbs inside the mouth to separate the jaws. You may need to gently move the animal's tongue away from the teeth in order to see the tables.

Reason:

- Placing thumbs in the diastema means that they will not be bitten.



Check your position!

Advice

Do not allow your arm or elbow to cover or press the animal's eye.

Your arm should be beneath the eye - with smaller animals (or if you are tall!) you will need to bend down to ensure this.

Do not put any pressure on the soft cartilage of the nose or nostrils with the upper hand.

Your hand should be placed on the hard part of the animal's nose. The nostrils should never be squashed or squeezed.

Reason

Pressing your arm or elbow against the eye will cause discomfort.

Impairing the animal's vision by covering the eye may cause fear.

Either of these may cause the animal to resist or struggle, compromising welfare and making handling more difficult.

The soft cartilage of the nose is more sensitive than the hard part of the nose and firm pressure here may cause discomfort to the animal.

Pressing on the nostrils will restrict the animal's breathing, and may cause the animal to resist or struggle, compromising welfare and making handling more difficult.



Figures 27 and 28. The correct hand position for opening the mouth.

6.5. Restraining foals

Restraint of the head should **not** be used with foals who are not yet accustomed to it. Foals not familiar with head restraint are likely to panic and struggle against a head-collar or other forms of head restraint, causing stress and serious risk of injury to themselves. Foals who need to be examined should be kept near to their mother (who should also be safely restrained) and restrained as follows:

- Wrap one arm around the foal's chest and shoulders, beneath the neck so as not to restrict the breathing.
- Wrap one arm around the hindquarters.
- 'Hug' the foal's body close to your body.
- Hold the foal gently but firmly.
- Speak in a soft, calm voice to help relax the foal.



Figure 25. The method of restraint is correct and the foal is relaxed and comfortable.

7. Tying

Equine animals should **not** be tied to anything solid that will not break and release them if they panic and struggle. As mentioned in Section 3.1, equine animals' natural instinct is to push/pull into pressure, and they may do this to such an extent that they seriously injure themselves. If you must tie the animal, always tie to something that will break under strong pressure.

A good option is to tie a breakable (e.g. partially frayed) piece of string around the solid object, and then tie the lead-rope on to the string (Figure 26). Therefore, if the animal becomes frightened, panics, struggles, slips or falls, the string should break and no serious harm will be caused to the animal.

If it is not possible to tie the lead-rope to a piece of breakable string or something similar, then another option is just to wrap it around an object rather than actually tying it completely, so that if the animal puts strong pressure on the rope, it will unwind and release the animal.

Do not tie equine animals to something solid.

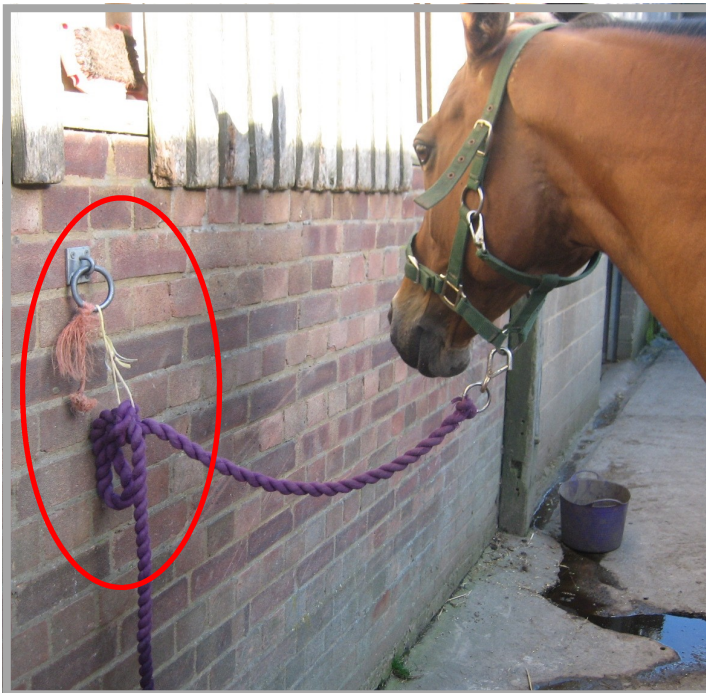


Figure 26. The lead-rope is not tied directly onto the metal ring, but is tied onto partially-frayed string which will break if the animal pulls strongly.

Step 1

Action:

Position your body correctly. Stand close to the animal's shoulder, facing forwards (in the same direction as the animal). The handler should be on the **opposite** side of the animal.

Reason:

- This is the safest position for you, and the easiest from which to open the mouth in a welfare-friendly manner.



Step 2

Action:

Gently place the hand closest to the animal on the top of the nose. Place the hand furthest away from the animal underneath the head.

Reason:

- The upper hand guides the position of the head, helps to prevent the animal from moving away (forwards or sideways) and protects you from any attempts to bite.
- The lower hand supports the weight and guides the position of the head.



9. Opening the mouth

Introduction

During welfare assessment it is necessary to open the animal's mouth to check the colour of the mucous membranes, and to see the teeth for ageing.

Before attempting to open the mouth for any reason, it is important to observe the mouth area for any obvious injuries or swelling which may cause pain to the animal if the mouth is opened. If there is injury on one side of the mouth area, open it from the other side and take care not to disturb the painful area. If you think that it is not possible to open the mouth without causing unnecessary pain to the animal, then do not proceed.

Sometimes it is only necessary to separate the lips (e.g. to observe the mucous membranes); other times you may need to separate the teeth (e.g. to observe the tables of the incisors). Do not open the mouth further than necessary or for longer than necessary to observe what you need to.



Use a quick release knot:

A quick release knot can be untied easily and quickly if it is necessary to release the animal suddenly. Therefore it is useful for both animal welfare and human safety, as sometimes you may need to move the animal quickly and should not be delayed by trying to untie a complicated knot.

To tie a quick release knot:

Step 1

Action:

Make a loop with the lead-rope through the string.



Step 2

Action:

Pass the side of the rope which is attached to the animal back through the first loop that you made.



Step 3

Action:

Tighten the rope. The finished quick release knot should look as shown in the photograph.

The end of the rope attached to the animal should remain tied if pulled. If the loose end of the rope is pulled, the knot should untie.

To release the animal, pull on the loose end of the rope (as shown by the red arrow in the photograph); the knot will be untied in one quick movement.



Length of rope

The rope should be long enough to permit the animal to move the head and neck to be able to scratch the body or legs and look around. Being able to move the head and neck also helps the animal to balance.

Height of rope

The rope should be tied at the animal's head height or above. Ropes tied low and close to the ground can be dangerous because the animal may stand on the rope or become entangled, which could cause panic. A rope tied low to the ground is also a risk to human safety; firstly because people may also trip or become tangled in it, and secondly because it may be necessary to bend down and put the head in a dangerous position close to the hooves in order to untie the rope.

Step 3

Action:

Apply gentle pressure with your fingers. When the animal moves back, release the pressure. If the animal stops and you would like to continue moving, apply the pressure again and release when the animal moves back.

Reason:

- Applying gentle pressure on the chest should encourage the animal to step backwards away from the pressure.
- Releasing the pressure when the animal moves backwards rewards the animal and reinforces the desired behaviour.



Step 4

Action

Thank the animal.

Reason:

- Rewarding the animal reassures that you are not a danger, reinforces desirable behaviour, and therefore makes it more likely that the animal will be unafraid and behave calmly during future handling.



8.4. Moving backwards

Step 1

Action:

Position your body correctly. Stand close to the animal's shoulder, facing towards the animal. Hold the lead-rope in the hand closest to the animal's head.

Reason:

- Holding the lead-rope in one hand means that your other hand is free to use to manoeuvre the animal.
- Facing towards the animal enables you to see in the direction you wish to move (backwards).
- You need to be able to see behind the animal to ensure it is safe to step back.



Step 2

Action:

After checking that the animal does not have any injuries in the area, place your free hand on the animal's chest.

Reason:

- Pressing on an injured area will cause pain to the animal and make handling more difficult.



8. Leading and manoeuvring

Introduction

During welfare assessment it may be necessary to lead, move or manoeuvre the animal; for example to move to a safe area for assessment, to move into the shade, to observe the gait, to return to the owner, etc.

Before attempting any leading or manoeuvring:

- Ensure that you are satisfied that the fit and position of the head-collar or rope halter is correct.
- Ensure that any other forms of restraint (such as hobbles, ropes around the neck etc.) are removed so that they will not interfere with the animal's ability to move.
- Ensure that the animal is unloaded. (Animals carrying loads should not be assessed.)
- Observe the animal for any indication that movement would cause unnecessary pain, for example if the animal is obviously lame. If the animal appears very lame after you begin to move, do not continue.
- Ensure that the route you want to take is free of hazards.

Do not move the animal any more than necessary to observe what you need to. When conducting welfare assessment, if you cannot see something properly from the position you are in, the first option is always to move **yourself** into a better position, rather than moving the animal.



Remember to reward!

Always remember to say 'thank you' to the animal after any manoeuvre or handling task. This is how the animal learns what is the correct behaviour to do in response to the handling signals. Showing kindness and interacting positively with the animal also sets a good example to other people watching you during handling.



Step 2

Action:

When the animal stops, release the pressure.

Reason:

- Releasing the pressure when the animal stops rewards the animal and reinforces the desired behaviour.



Step 3

Action

Thank the animal.

Reason:

- Rewarding the animal reassures that you are not a danger, reinforces desirable behaviour, and therefore makes it more likely that the animal will be unafraid and behave calmly during future handling.



8.3. Stopping (halting)

Step 1

Action:

Keeping your body correctly positioned beside the animal's shoulder, stop walking, and apply gentle backwards pressure to the animal's nose through the lead-rope and head-collar. If the animal does not stop, repeat the application of pressure.

Reason:

- Stopping walking and applying gentle pressure to the nose should indicate to the animal that you want to stop.



8.1. Moving forwards

Moving forwards:

Step 1

Action:

Position your body correctly. Stand close to the animal's shoulder, or slightly in front, facing forwards. Look in the direction you want to move; do not look directly at the animal.

Reason:

- This is the safest position for you to lead from.
- Facing towards and staring at the animal is intimidating and will make the animal less likely to walk along with you.



Step 2

Action:

Apply gentle pressure through the lead-rope and head-collar in the forward direction, and begin walking.

If the animal stops and you would like to continue moving, repeat the process as described above.

Reason:

- Applying gentle pressure and walking should indicate to the animal that you want to move forwards.



Step 3

Action:

When the animal moves forwards, release any pressure on the lead-rope.

Reason:

- Releasing the pressure when the animal moves forward rewards the animal and reinforces the correct behaviour.



Step 4

Action:

Thank the animal.

Reason:

- Rewarding the animal reassures that you are not a danger, reinforces desirable behaviour, and therefore makes it more likely that the animal will be unafraid and behave calmly during future handling.



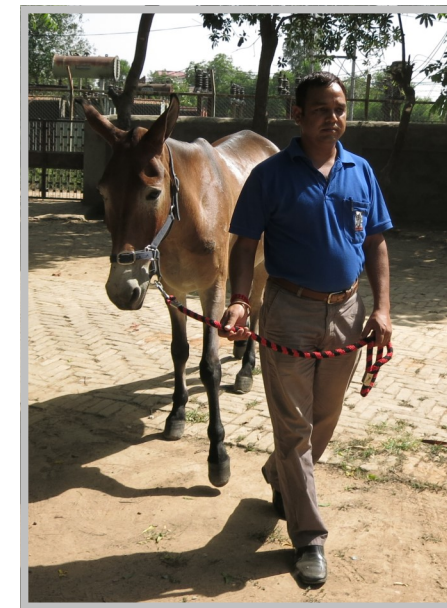
Step 3

Action:

When the animal moves in the desired direction, release the pressure. There is no need to keep pulling on the head-collar.

Reason:

- Releasing the pressure when the animal moves in the correct direction rewards the animal and reinforces the desired behaviour.



Step 4

Action:

Thank the animal.

Reason:

- Rewarding the animal reassures that you are not a danger, reinforces desirable behaviour, and therefore makes it more likely that the animal will be unafraid and behave calmly during future handling.



Turning towards or away from you:

Step 1

Action:

Position your body correctly. Stand close to the animal's shoulder, or slightly in front, facing forwards. Look in the direction you want to move; do not look directly at the animal.

Reason:

- This is the safest position for you to lead from.
- Facing towards and staring at the animal is intimidating and will make the animal less likely to walk along with you.



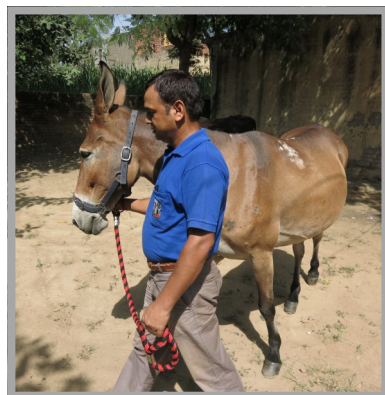
Step 2

Action:

Apply gentle pressure through the lead-rope and head-collar in the direction you would like to move in (left or right) and start walking in that direction. If the animal stops and you would like to continue moving, apply the pressure again and release when the animal moves in the desired direction.

Reason:

- Applying gentle pressure to the left or right, and walking in the same direction should indicate to the animal where you want to move.



8.2. Pivoting and turning

Pivoting is when the animal moves the hindquarters around to the left or right, whilst the fore limbs remain in a similar place. Turning is when the animal turns to the left or right whilst walking.

It is useful for your safety to be able to ask the animal to pivot, because this manoeuvre can be used to give you more space in situations when it is not safe to ask the animal to walk forwards. For example, if you find yourself being squeezed into an unsafe position (e.g. between the animal and a fence/vehicle/other animal), you can ask the animal to pivot away from you so that you and the animal are not at risk. It would not be safe to walk the animal forwards or turn away, because this would put you directly into the hind limbs danger zone and at risk of being kicked.

You can reduce the risk of such a situation arising by ensuring that you have a clear space to work in.

Pivoting away from you:

Step 1

Action:

Position your body correctly. Stand close to the animal's shoulder, facing towards the animal. Hold the lead-rope in the hand closest to the animal's head.

Reason:

- Holding the lead-rope in one hand means that your other hand is free to use to manoeuvre the animal.
- Facing towards the animal enables you to see in the direction you wish the animal to pivot (away from you).
- You need to be able to see to the other side of the animal to ensure it is safe to pivot.



Step 2

Action:

Turn the animal's head towards you by applying gentle pressure through the head-collar.

Reason:

- This will encourage the animal to pivot the hindquarters in the direction away from you.



Step 3

Action:

After checking that the animal does not have any injuries in the area, place your free hand on the animal's ribs, and apply gentle but firm pressure with your fingers. If the animal stops and you would like to continue pivoting, apply the pressure again and release when the animal moves away again.

Reason:

- Pressing on an injured area will cause pain to the animal and make handling more difficult.
- Applying gentle pressure on the ribs should encourage the animal to pivot the hindquarters away from the pressure.



Step 4

Action:

When the animal pivots the hindquarters away from you, release the pressure.

Reason:

- Releasing the pressure when the animal pivots rewards the animal and reinforces the correct behaviour.



Step 5

Action:

Thank the animal.

Reason:

- Rewarding the animal reassures that you are not a danger, reinforces desirable behaviour, and therefore makes it more likely that the animal will be unafraid and behave calmly during future handling.

