

HORSE CORRAL

Reading a Horse's Body Signals

By Alex Valverde, Equine Advocates Communications Manager

Communication is essential to developing a strong relationship between equines and their caretakers. Since horses can't use words to tell us their mood or thoughts, we need to know how to read their body language. From the tip of their ears to the end of their tail, horses have many ways to let us know what they're feeling.

Happy Horse

A happy, relaxed horse will stand with one resting hind leg, facing forward with ears up and a closed, relaxed mouth. Licking and chewing are also indicators that a horse is happy. When riding, it's good if the horse's tail is slightly raised and swings loosely.

If their head and neck are lowered, their ears are turned out to the side, their eyes are half-closed, and their lower lip is hanging low, chances are they are dozing. This indicates that they feel they are in a safe and comfortable environment. When approaching a resting horse, it's important to move slowly and calmly, since the horse may be startled if you approach suddenly. Call their name or make some noise, and don't approach until he or she turn their head to indicate that they're paying attention to you.

Worried or Anxious Horse

If you approach a horse and they display signs of anxiousness, they could be uncomfortable with your or another person's presence. This includes a horse standing with a raised head, ears held back or pointing in different directions, a tense muzzle with square nostrils, and tense cheek muscles. When it comes to their eyes, they could be darting back and forth, or the white part could be showing. (Arabic and Appaloosa breeds are the exception since the whites of their eyes are routinely visible.)

Sick or Hurt Horse

Signs of pain or discomfort include limping, biting at their sides, having dull eyes or pinned back ears, and other signs of general malaise, such as a sleepy, distraught facial expression.

Other signs that a horse isn't feeling well include standing far off from a group as if they don't want to interact with other horses, displaying a fixed stare and rigid stance, and reduced activity level. Keep an eye on this behavior so injuries or sickness are spotted as soon as possible.

Unhappy or Aggressive Horse

If an equine's ears are pinned back to their neck, they're unhappy with the situation. If they also have the whites of their eyes showing and their mouth open, showing their teeth, this is a warning sign to stay away. An angry or annoyed horse will also stomp, strike, or kick.



When a horse's tail is swishing quickly from side to side or up and down, or if the tail is clamped down, this is often a warning sign that they're about to kick or buck, and you need to heed it immediately.

Learning a horse's body language takes time, but most importantly, over time, you will get to know and understand your horse well. Caretakers should observe how a horse's postures and expressions change as he or she interacts with you as well as other people and animals. Before long, you'll be able to understand the more subtle signs that their mood has changed and how to communicate with your horse in these cases.



EQUINE
ADVOCATES



Equine Advocates Rescue & Sanctuary
3212 State Route 66, Valatie, NY

2025 OPEN DAY SCHEDULE

11:00 AM - 4:00 PM

Sunday, May 4
Saturday, June 7
Saturday, July 19
Saturday, August 16
Saturday, September 13
Saturday, October 18
Sunday, November 9



Come spend a few hours walking around and meeting our horses, ponies, donkeys and mules, most of whom were rescued from abuse, neglect and/or slaughter. Also, you will have the opportunity to meet our retired veteran military horses from the Caisson Platoon at Arlington National Cemetery. All are happily enjoying their life here at the sanctuary.

We have graphics posted at each paddock so you can learn about where each animal came from and why they needed to be rescued. This helps make your visit a much more personal and educational experience!

FEEDING OUR EQUINE RESIDENTS IS NOT PERMITTED

Please feel free to picnic at our pond and enjoy one of the most beautiful and serene spots here at the sanctuary.



Please note that all visitors will need to sign a release form upon arrival. Sorry, No pets permitted. Admission is free, but we do ask that you please consider making a tax-deductible donation. Also, on your visit, learn about our Equine Sponsorship and Monthly Giving Plan.

Equine Advocates is a non-profit 501(c)(3) equine protection/charitable organization founded in 1996. Our Mission Statement is "To rescue, protect and prevent the abuse of equines through education, investigation, rescue operations, the dissemination of information to the public and the operation of a horse sanctuary for slaughter-bound, abused and neglected equines."

Photos: Jake & Emma by Dana Goedewaagen. Jeffrey Mac by Michele Jacobs.

www.equineadvocates.org

518-392-0175