



Welcome to Winter Bonding with your Horse!

Depending on where you are, winter can be a tough time to do much with our horses, between the snow, cold and ice, it leaves you and your horse meeting only at feeding time or when weather allows for you to make it out to check in at the boarding facility.

Hopefully if you find one of those nice days that end up scattered throughout winter, you can use these ideas to keep that connection with your horse. During Winter Bonding with your Horse, you and your horse will spend time together and hopefully you will have a better relationship at the end!

Day 1: **Warm Up with Walking**

Slow things down and take a walk with your horse! If you can get outside, halter that pony up and wander around. Don't look at it as a training session - although if your horse spooks at something, let them sniff, explore the object and encourage curiosity. Just walk, enjoying the crispness of the weather and being outside together.

If you have to be in an indoor arena, put out some poles or cones and meander through them, with no specific pattern in mind. Again, it's not a training session - take the pressure off of you and your horse and just BE TOGETHER!

Day 2: **Parts of your Horse**

Can you name 5 parts of your horse? How about 15?

Test your knowledge with [the Intro Parts of the Horse Quiz](#).

After you have taken the quiz, go out by your horse and see if you can name those same parts on your horse.

Day 3: **Groom, Groom, Groom**

Grooming your horse can be a fantastic way to spend some time together, get a good workout in and pamper your horse.

Today, spend at least 25 minutes grooming your horse!

First, curry comb

- Use that curry comb on the large areas of the horse - the neck, the barrel, the rump
- Curry in a circular motion

Second, hard or medium brush

- Use long sweeping strokes to remove the dirt and hair that the curry comb pulled up

Third, soft brush (don't forget about the legs)

- Finish with the soft brush to get the pesky dirt and hair the hard brush left behind



Fourth, pick out feet

- Especially in the winter, hooves can build up with snow, which may turn to ice due to the heat of the hooves. Make sure those hooves are picked out nice and clean.

Fifth, comb out the mane and/or tail

- If the mane and/or tail is tangly and snarly, use some leave-in conditioner or baby oil to help work the knots. Use a comb or a brush and make that mane and/or tail smooth and tangle free

Have questions? No worries! Watch the [Grooming Basics](#) video and [How to brush your horse's mane and tail](#)

Day 4: **Stepping in Time**

Will your horse move one hoof at a time and only one hoof? If you ask your horse to move their hind left, will they? What if you ask for the front right? Do you get every hoof but the one you asked for? Today, spend 30 minutes, focusing on only one hoof. Ask your horse to move just one hoof, one step.

Use small little touches on the halter and lead rope. Move the lead rope in small, incremental, different directions until you find which way your horse understands that you want them to move the hoof you are asking for. You can work on the hoof going backward or forwards - but make sure you only ask for one hoof, one step, one direction in the beginning.

Make sure to take small walk breaks often. Don't hammer away at getting that one hoof. Give your horse and yourself a chance to step back and relax.

Don't rush, don't get frustrated. Remember - you are teaching your horse!

Day 5: **Bareback Time**

Do you feel comfortable riding your horse bareback? Do you trust them? Do they trust you? If the answers are yes, then swing your leg over and wander around bareback. Throw out some poles and/or cones and use those to make different patterns.

Bareback is a great time to work on checking those brakes. For example, walk a circle, then ask your horse to stop. Count to 5 and continue walking; Walk a figure 8, then ask your horse to stop. Count to 25 and continue walking; etc.

Remember - depending on temperatures, you don't want to get your horse hot and sweaty. Take it easy. The main goal here is to spend time together without pestering your horse every step.

If your answer is no, spend some time going for a walk on the ground or working on asking your horse to stand quietly by the mounting block.



Day 6: Vital Vitals

Do you know how to take your horse's temperature? Will they allow you to take their temperature? Do you know what their temperature should be if you can take it? What about their respiratory rate, pulse/heart rate or capillary refill time?

Take [this quiz](#) to test your knowledge of horse vitals.

After you take the quiz, take your horse's vitals.

If your horse will allow, take their temperature every day for a week. Does their temperature fluctuate?

*Make a note of the temperature outside on the days you take your horse's temperature. Does the temperature outside seem to affect your horse's temperature?

Want to learn how to take your horse's vital signs? Watch [How to take Horse Vitals](#) to learn how!



Normal Horse Vitals

Temperature - 99.5 - 101.5

Pulse/Heart Rate - 32-44 beats per minute

Respiratory Rate - 8 to 16 breaths per minute

Mucous Membranes - Normally pink w/ capillary refill time of 1-2 seconds

Skin Pliability - Pinched skin should relax in 1-2 seconds

Gut Sounds - Constant sound is normal, gurgles are normal, no sound could indicate colic. Running water sound means overactive interior due to some cause

Day 7: EEEEEKKK-mergency Dismount

Do you know what to do when your horse gets a little spunky? Do you know how to safely perform an Emergency Dismount? Can your horse handle you performing an Emergency Dismount when they aren't being a goofball?

Even if your horse isn't being weird, do you feel comfortable leaving the saddle? Does that create fear or anxiety? Knowing that you can leave the saddle safely and not be injured can increase your confidence in the saddle.

Practice the Emergency Dismount today!

The extra bonus is you will get lots of practice mounting as well!

How to do an Emergency Dismount

**If you are practicing with a saddle, please make sure to not get caught on the saddle (saddle horn if in a western saddle) with any loose clothing.

**Ideally, this will be practiced in an enclosed area, on a trusted horse, and with someone around for assistance. If you aren't sure if your horse will stick around after you dismount, ask a friend to hold your horse.



Day 8: **OHHH, Stretches!**

Stretching is hugely beneficial for both horses and their riders. Do you stretch before you ride? Do you know what stretches will help you while in the saddle? Check out this article for rider stretches: [Three Pre-ride Stretches](#)

What about your horse? Do you know how to do stretches with them? Will they allow you to pick up and move their legs to do a stretch?

Check out this article on stretches for your horse: [5 Essential stretches](#) you should be doing with your horse

After you've looked over stretches for you and your horse, head out to the barn and treat your horse to some pampering!

Already know how to do stretches? Head on out! Don't forget to stretch yourself also!

Day 9: **Mounting Block**

Will your horse stand quietly by the mounting block? Do they try to take off or actually take off when your foot touches the stirrup? If your horse has problems standing quietly by the mounting block, take today and work with them on just standing near the mounting block while you stand on top. You can tack up or not, that doesn't matter. The goal today is not to mount. The goal is for your horse to realize that the mounting block is not the starting gate to a race. Keep yourself calm and relaxed. Rub your horse on their poll, on the tips of their ears, releasing endocrines that will help your horse relax and enjoy standing by the mounting block.

Will your horse stand quietly by the mounting block but the instant your foot is in the stirrup, they are off to the races? Take today to put your foot in the stirrup, just your toe, and see how long you can get your horse to stand quietly before they try to go. Slowly increase the time you keep your foot in the stirrup.

*Remember to take walk breaks in-between sessions to give you and your horse a chance to relax and breathe.

If your horse is good at the mounting block, then take today to practice mounting and dismounting. When we ride, we usually mount once and dismount once. Your horse gets to know and understand this pattern. What will your horse do if you mount and dismount 4 times during a ride, what about 12?

Watch how I work with Eclipse on her patience and lining up to the mounting block in this video - [Lining your horse up to the mounting block](#)



Day 10: Braid Away

If you are following along, on Day 3 you spent some good time grooming your horse and getting them all spic and span. Now that their mane and tail are tangle free, braid away. Can you braid your horse's mane or tail? Will they stand still and relax while you devote 30 minutes playing with their hair? Can you do a running braid in their mane? How about a French braid in their tail? Plain straight braids in their mane and/or tail? Take some time today to try some different hair styles on your horse!

Want to learn how to do a running braid? Watch this video - [Putting a running braid in Gidget's mane](#)

Day 11: Walking with or without a Purpose

Depending on where you are, winter might be taking a bite out of your quality time with your horse. Slow things down and take a walk with your horse! If you can get outside, halter that pony up and wander around. Don't look at it as a training session - although if your horse spooks at something, let them sniff, explore the object, and encourage their curiosity. Just walk, enjoying the birds singing and being outside together.

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*Looking for a little extra challenge?

Will your horse walk faster when you walk faster? Will your horse slow down when you slow down? How slow can you walk and still have your horse walk in time with you?

*Looking for a little extra challenge?

Will your horse walk with you off line? Will your horse stay on your shoulder as you wander around the arena or an enclosed area?

Day 12: Leg Wraps

Can you wrap a polo wrap on your horse's legs? Do you know how to rewrap them after you've used them? What about standing wraps? Can you wrap a pillow wrap and a standing bandage?

The best part of practicing wrapping polo wraps and standing bandages is that you can practice on a willing human, warm in your own home!

Once you get comfortable wrapping legs, the human ones that is, then head on out to the barn and practice on your horse!

[How to wrap your horse's leg with a polo wrap](#)

[Quick Tip - How to wrap polo wraps](#)

Make sure to be safe when wrapping the hind legs - if your horse isn't used to their legs being wrapped, they might kick

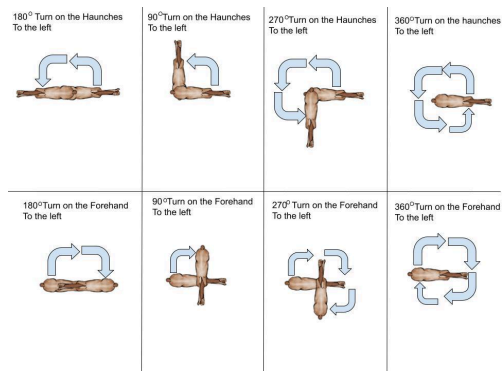
Day 13: Showmanship-ish.....

Does your horse trot in hand? Can your horse perform a turn on the haunches? While Showmanship has its place in the show ring, it also has wonderful benefits out of the show ring. When your horse knows to lead with its nose at your shoulder or can perform a beautiful turn on the haunches, you have a good citizen on the ground and all of these maneuvers will pay off under saddle.

Today, practice some Showmanship maneuvers.

- Leading with your horse at your shoulder
- Trotting in hand on a straight line
- Trotting in hand on a curve
- Turn on the haunches (90 degrees, 180 degrees, 270 degrees or 360 degrees)
- Backing up straight

Are you and your horse already Showmanship Champs? Practice some patterns - get yourself and your horse moving!



Day 14: Ground Tying

Will your horse stand "tied" to the ground? How far away can you get before your horse starts to walk away? Do they pay attention to you and look for your cues or are they off in la la land?

Start with your horse on the lead. Back away, leaving slack in the lead rope. If your horse follows, correct them, use your whoa word and start over.

Don't go too far, too fast. If your horse keeps wanting to follow, introduce a cue word - tie, stand, stay, or whichever one works best for you. That way you have a specific way to cue your horse when you want them to ground tie or when you don't.

*Remember to take walk breaks between practicing. Give you and your horse a mental break and relax!



Disclaimer:

Horses, being a flight animal, can be dangerous to work around and with. Activities with and training a horse can be unpredictable at times. Do not attempt any of these activities, training or procedures without proper supervision, safety equipment and proper facilities. Neither Crossingtimbersequine.com, Crossing Timbers Equine, LLC, nor Kristin Hodge and its/their employees, agents, and sponsors are responsible for any injury(its) or loss resulting from these exercises and demonstrations for horse and horse training activities contained herein.

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