

ARENA – STEP 2

Poke and Play Softly

A wise horseman once said "Firm, but gentle." The idea of being firm but gentle is true in every aspect of handling horses effectively- a firm guide is required for the horse to respect its handler and feel safe following their command, but a gentle touch makes being handled much more pleasant for both horse and human. When handling horses there are five different ways we can apply pressure in this firm but gentle manner. We like to call this " Poking and Playing Softly"

Pressure types:

- 1. Air - Hovering close to your horse with your hand**
- 2. Hair - Touching it softly, brushing the hair with your hand**
- 3. Skin - Pushing just enough to push against the skin**
- 4. Muscle - Pushing harder to guide the horse.**
- 5. Bone - Pushing hard, so you can feel the bone.**

If you are unsure of the levels of pressure at all, feel free to practice each on your own forearm before practicing on your horse!

To practice these pressures on your horse effectively here are a few exercises you could try;

Move your horses hind quarters away from you

Move your horses shoulder away from you

Move your horses entire body sideways

When applying pressure to your horse do your best to keep the 'playing" aspect in sight. Horses all naturally love to play. A horse learns best when pressure is released. For instance when asking your horse to move his haunches over start by hovering your hand about his point of hip, if he does not move touch the hair, if that does not work apply pressure to the skin, muscle and then finally to the bone. As soon as your horse moves his haunches over release all pressure and praise him. Now try again, start again with the air then the hair and so forth, eventually your horse will understand that just the air means for him to move over and he will gladly oblige.