

## **Horse Show Behavior and Procedures**

**1. First and foremost, follow the rules of the show/the show grounds and the rules in the Handbook** In 4H; every member and a parent/guardian should be familiar with the rules for each class the member is competing in. Do you know what kind of bits are acceptable for western pleasure? Can you hold the reins with two hands in a horsemanship class? Is it required to use a lead shank with a chain for showmanship classes? You should know and follow the rules, as this makes it fair for everyone.

**2. Horse show etiquette starts in the parking lot.** At shows, riders might not have stalls and get their horses ready at the trailer. If this is the case, competitors should leave sufficient distance between trucks and trailers to allow movement for horses and riders. Remember that two side-by-side trailers may need to have horses tied up with their hindquarters facing each other. People will need to be able to safely move between those horses and not be in danger of either horses or people being kicked. Some of the horses tied to trailers will be inexperienced at showing, and may be very nervous or uncomfortable with having strange horses near them.

Be sure to bring a muck bucket and fork. It is very bad manners to leave manure in the parking and walkway areas. Clean up after your own horse!

At no time should you ride or lead your horse through non-horse areas unless the show staff has directed you to do so.

It is also extremely important to drive slowly at equestrian competitions. Be cautious of pulling up to a horse trailer with horses tied to it. You may cause a “spook” that can lead to a horse breaking free and running loose at a show. That is dangerous for pedestrians and horses alike!

Soon after you arrive, sign up for the classes you intend to compete in. If you are unsure what category you belong in, please ask a 4H leader, or someone that is helping with sign ups. If you sign up for a class, but later in the day decide not to participate in it, please let the show officials know as soon as possible so they are not wondering where you are when you do not show up for that class. When you decide to not compete in a class you have signed up for, it is called a “scratch”.

As a competitor, you will be given a paper number to wear. It can be attached to the back of your shirt (with safety pins or some other method), or if you have two copies of the same number, you can attach one number to each side of your saddle blanket when you are riding. If you have long hair, make sure it is contained in a way that it does not cover your number.

**3. Moving around and using the show grounds.** Riders should place themselves in “bubbles” at horse shows. Walking too close to another horse, or letting them sniff each other might cause a bite or kick, and even the calmest of horses can strike out if they feel cornered. When walking a horse to the show ring, a stall, the trailer or the wash area, a rider should be careful to maintain a safe distance. It is okay to ask others to move themselves or their horses out of your “bubble”. If they do not or cannot move, it is your responsibility to move your “bubble” somewhere else! To be safe, you should assume any horse you don’t know is unfriendly and keep a distance.

Before entering the wash stall areas, make sure that no one else is using it. Someone else may have brought his or her supplies for washing, then gone to retrieve a horse. Make sure you do not leave your items in the wash rack where they will be in the way, or cause a hazard. In addition, remember that other people have horses too. Shouting, making noise, waving colorful objects and littering all go against good horse show behavior. This goes for barn aisles where riders have stalls for their horses. Keep all unneeded items out of the aisles!

If young children are attending the show, make sure they are not running around unattended, marching up and down the bleachers, waving jackets around, etc. Keep strollers and bicycles away from horse areas. Many horses are not accustomed to seeing them and will act like they are monsters that might try to eat them!

**4. Schooling or warming up a horse.** There is usually a warm up ring open for competitors who are getting ready for their classes. They are not intended for learning new things or fixing bad habits; they are for warming up. Unfortunately, the warm up ring or arena is often the most dangerous location on the grounds. Be aware of your surroundings in the warm-up area!

Riders should take as little time as possible warming up. Monopolizing the area prevents other riders from getting ready. If you need to lunge your horse before riding, please arrive early enough to not take up the center of the ring while others need to be riding there. Do not ride together in a “pack” with your friends. You will make it difficult, if not impossible for others to pass around your group.

If a rider falls off of a horse in the arena, all horses need to STOP moving and an adult will assist the rider, and help with the horse. Do not start your horse moving again until the show staff gives an “all clear” message.

General ring or arena etiquette says that when you pass someone going the opposite direction, you should pass with your horse's left shoulder to the other horse's left shoulder. That means horses traveling counter clock-wise have the rail. Horses traveling clock-wise should stay to the inside or right of the oncoming horse traffic. If the majority of riders are going in one direction, you should try to go with them. If the horse in front of you is not close to the rail and you wish to keep your horse on the rail, say “Rail” or “Outside” to let the rider ahead of you know your intentions. If you need to pass to the inside and the distance is a little closer than you would like, say “Inside”. Make sure and speak loudly enough to be heard.

Do not park your horse on the rail to chat with someone outside the arena – you will be in the way of riders that need the rail. If you need momentary encouragement or instruction from someone outside the arena, look behind you and warn the riders behind you that you will be stopping. Listen briefly to the instructions, then again look around you and move safely into the flow of horse traffic.

Do not stop suddenly or stop and then back your horse in the warm up arena unless you are absolutely sure no one is close behind you. You could accidentally cause a wreck that causes injuries to horses or riders. Be aware of the traffic jam you may cause by stopping or backing up.

Remember to maintain your safety “bubble”. When riding, you should be able to see the hind feet of the horse ahead of you. If a horse and rider pass too close in front of you, carefully slow down so that horse has less chance of kicking yours. If you are stuck in a “pack” of horses, carefully get out of the mob and move to a safer place on the rail.

**RED TAIL RIBBONS** If your horse has ever kicked or bucked when another horse passes it, please put a red ribbon in its tail to warn others of the possibility that it could happen again. It is best to not take chances. If you see a horse with a red ribbon in its tail, be aware of what that means and take care to pass that horse with plenty of distance all the way around it.

**5. Show ring etiquette.** Horse show etiquette is particularly important during classes at competitions. Riders must respect their fellow competitors as well as judges and spectators.

Be sure to show up on time for the beginning of the classes you have signed up for, and check in with the official in the class check in area. They will make sure each competitor is ready to enter at the correct time. If your horse is one that wears a red ribbon in its tail, please enter the class last, so the other horses and riders are not at risk of a kick from your horse while entering the arena. Be sure to remember what your competition number is! You will feel silly if someone asks you what number you are and you do not know – especially if it is the show judge!

There are three main officials to be concerned with once you enter the show ring:

The Judge is a paid professional horseperson that has scheduled this day to determine which horses have competed best in each class. If a judge speaks to you, smile and respond with a “Yes Ma’am” or “Yes Sir”. If the judge gives you a verbal comment such as, “Great ride. Just jog a little slower”, answer with a “Thank you Sir”.

The Announcer will be giving instructions on what gait your horse should be going, and what direction you are to travel and when you should enter and exit the arena.

Most of the time, in classes with many competitors on the rail, you will be asked to enter the arena at a walk with your right shoulder nearest the rail. This is counter clock-wise, also known as “tracking left” because all of your turns around the arena will be to the left. Occasionally you will be asked to enter at a trot or jog, or you may be asked to walk in, find a spot on the rail and stop and wait for further instructions. Be sure to listen to the directions given through the loud speakers or directions given by the judge or ring steward.

The announcer will also tell you when and where to line up for judging at the end of the class. You may be asked to line up single-file in a specified area, or the center of the arena facing the Ring Steward.

The Ring Steward is an assistant to the horse show judge. The steward may be taking notes for the judge, or be communicating the judge’s wishes to the show Announcer. The Ring Steward will also show you where to stand your horse for judging line up. In halter or showmanship classes, the Ring Steward will also direct you to where to have your horse stand before final judging takes place. Sometimes in halter classes, the judge will move horses into order of rank. The horse he intends to give first place will be at the head of the line. The horse he give 3<sup>rd</sup> place will be lined

up in the third spot behind the 2nd place horse.

Passing other horses during competition can be dangerous if horses pass too close, so it is best to find a spot on the rail. When a rider is moving faster than other horses in the arena, he or she should pass wide or make a circle to avoid a collision or a kicking incident. Remember to keep your horse in a safe “bubble”. If other horses are crowding you, move your horse to a spot where you can maintain your safe zone.

Be polite and don't block the judge's view of other horses. This is called “Shielding” and is considered rude behavior. In some show associations, you can actually be disqualified for doing it. Also remember if you do not maintain your “bubble” you may actually cause another horse and rider to have a bad performance and of course that would be bad sportsmanship. Do what you can to show your own horse at his best, but don't keep someone else from doing their best!

If the show announcer asks riders to back up, stop, or reverse directions be sure to turn your head and look around you before moving. If another horse has stopped too close behind you, and is not ready to back up yet, you do not want to back right into them. You can move forward a few steps then back up, or move sideways a little to make room for yourself, and then back up.

Just like the practice arena, if a rider falls, all riders must stop their horses from moving until the rider is assisted and the horse is caught.

If a horse is “fractious” or too unruly, it may be asked by the judge or the show officials to be dismissed from that class. This is not to punish the horse or rider; it is done for the well being of all participants. If a rider feels unsafe at any time in a competition, he or she may approach the ring steward and asked to be dismissed from the class. If the class is crowded, you may be asked to have your horse stand in the center of the arena until it is safe for you to exit.

When the judging is finished and placings are announced, only the horses that have placed should exit the line up. They should exit in the order called so that the person handing out the ribbons is not confused. Once all the horses that have placed have exited the line up, the other horses may exit in an orderly fashion. Just be sure to listen to the announcer, because you may be given specific exiting instructions.

**6. Equestrian sportsmanship.** Good sportsmanship is expected of all competitors. This means respecting fellow riders and show officials, and taking wins and losses graciously.

Remember that the judge only has two eyes and they have to be looking the same direction at the same time. The judge does not have eyes in the back of his/her head! A judge can only comment on what is seen. You may have a horse that acts up behind the judge, and then performs perfectly while the judge is looking and place very well in the ribbons. Just as many times the opposite happens – your horse is an angel when the judge is not looking, but acts up right when the judge looks at you. Just remember that this happens to everyone! Be aware that the judge has no idea if this has been the best ride of your life or the worst. He can only compare you and your horse to the other people and horses in the arena at that moment in time.

If you disagree with the judge, do not approach the judge and ask him why you did not place as well as you think you should! How long would a horse show last if every rider did that? If you have a grievance, you or your parents can take it to the show management, NOT THE JUDGE.

Riders should make a habit of congratulating the winners of any class, regardless of how that rider performed. Throwing fits at the arena or accusing judges of favoritism is poor sportsmanship, as is bragging about a win or criticizing other competitors.

Please remember that most horse show staff are volunteers spending a very long day at a show trying to make it a great experience for everyone. Please be respectful and polite to all horse show staff. Be sure to thank them for their efforts (we would like them to do it again).

In the end, most other competitors that come to our horse shows will not remember how you placed, but they will remember how you behaved. It would be great if this was the year when everyone said, "Those Bridle Bunch folks are such great people."

This is a compilation from many internet resources adapted for use by 4H Bridle Bunch Indiana Horse and Pony Club members